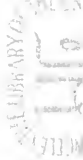


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ALLA GIORNATA.

VOL. I.

LONDON

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“ALLA GIORNATA;”

OR,

TO THE DAY.

“ When I go musing all alone,
Thinking of divers things foreknown;
When I build castles in the air,
Void of sorrow, and void of fear,
Pleasing myself with phantasms sweet,
Methinks the time runs very fleet.”

Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

1826.

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ABOVE the door-way of a marble palace which stands on the banks of Arno, in Pisa, the inscription that gives the following story its title, is to this day read.

The words "ALLA GIORNATA," or *To the Day*, allude to a fact which has often been a subject of inquiry, and which the following romantic legend will tend to explain.—May its perusal afford a degree of interest to those, who, like myself, have wandered by Arno's side, and have perhaps asked in vain for the meaning of these mysterious words.



CHAPTER I.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE BIRTH AND EDUCATION OF
ILDEGARDA GHERARDESCA.

Se a ciascun si vedesse in fronte scritto
I guai di altrui,
Quanto mai che ci invidio fanno,
Ci farebbero pietà.

ILDEGARDA Gherardesca was an only daughter,—her mother died in giving her birth; the most melancholy event that can mark the entrance of an individual into this world of trial, and one which too often throws a corresponding shade over the mind of such offspring, when arrived at years of reason. Thus, over the young Ildegarda hung a gloom, which, however dis-

persed at times by a natural gaiety of disposition, habitually tended to colour her existence. Her moments of cheerfulness were brief; like the sunbeams which pass over nature's face during its dark and autumn showers, which "glisten but—and die." One brother, some years older than herself, had been the companion of her childhood, and his youth gave the fairest promise of perfection. But he was one of those stars, which oftentimes shoot athwart the horizon of life, to tell only of brighter things that may be known hereafter; their brilliancy as exquisite, as their earthly duration is brief.

Guglielmo had, at the early age of twenty, made campaigns in the wars of Genoa and Florence, and had returned crowned with honours and victory; but envy could not endure the glory of his career, and he fell, the victim of treachery and poison, into an early grave!

Ildegarda mourned over her dying brother with that unsubdued sentiment of grief, which wrings the young and enthusiast mind, untu-

tored by previous sorrow, and unresigned to the lessons of religion. Great sums of money had been expended in bringing medical aid to his assistance from all parts of the world, particularly from Germany; and Guglielmo's life was thus protracted by care and skill long enough to allow of his exacting a solemn promise from his father and sister, that they would drop all endeavours to discover his murderer. But this very demand convinced Ildegarda that she was acquainted with the object on whom his suspicions rested, and that object was Pafetta di Montescudajo. To this person she had been betrothed; and for him, till then, had felt as towards her future lord, a tender regard and esteem. The necessity of breaking all ties, with one she had been used to look upon in such a very different light, but who now appeared as the assassin of her brother, tended to give a fatal turn to her mind, which took henceforth a mistaken view of human nature in general. Idolized, admired, had Ildegarda drank from no

other chalice than such flower-covered bowl as the universal homage of those around her raised ever to her lips, she might have ended in being at best a selfish creature. But there are great lessons learnt at a death-bed; and who, that in early youth has witnessed the appalling scene, entirely forgets the salutary thoughts such scene suggests?

The death of Guglielmo rendered her more than ever her father's companion: she became the sole object of his affection—the sole heiress of his ancestral honours—the sole inheritor of his immense wealth. The princely income of Gherardesca had partly devolved to him from his paternal possessions, and had been partly amassed during his successful wars in the East. Of his possessions, rumour told a thousand tales—tales which might have graced the chronicles of romance; but in great measure they were nevertheless true, for he had riches in unusual store; and, as in those unsettled and precarious times the treasures of the great lay vested in

jewels and actual specie, secured in their castles and palaces, it was not surprising the vulgar should ascribe to supernatural, or rather infernal agency, the acquisition of those wonders which they occasionally beheld.

The mode of life also of the Marchese, his superstitious love of judicial astrology and its professors, drew around him characters of various descriptions, and tended to give strength to these false and ignorant conclusions. His affection and pride in Ildegarda, however, had prompted him likewise to court persons of real talent of every nation, in order that their intercourse might instruct and direct the opening mind of his child.

Though Goffredo Gherardesca was himself a man of rugged mould, who had spent his youth in camps, where neither leisure nor assistance had afforded him opportunity to consider any other subject than that which lay at the sword's point, he was yet endowed with a natural quickness of intellect, and sensibility of soul, which, in his

declining years, taught him to seek that recreation from others, which intellectual attainments ever impart ; and, above all, to look for those heavenly consolations, which religion alone sheds over every scene of life. The natural light of his mind had created a distrust in him, touching the efficacy of those minute ceremonials, and the superstitious ritual which made up the religion of his own church. He sought with eagerness, proportioned to the deficiencies which he found there, for some one to guide him in the way of truth,—nor did he seek in vain.

There were springing up secretly in different parts of Europe, particularly in Germany, and towards the North, numbers of enlightened persons, who, at this period, entertained opinions totally opposite to those in general acceptation ; and who, to carry on their investigations, found it necessary to league themselves together, and make a sort of brotherhood, in mystical and secret bands of association ; which, however, were

not so secret but that they excited the suspicion of the great body of the priesthood; and having drawn down upon themselves the dread and displeasure of this preponderating part of the community, they found it difficult to reside anywhere in safety. To persons of this class, thus unprotected, and exposed to constant persecution from general opinion, Goiffredo Gherardesca eagerly offered an asylum and countenance; he was delighted with the boldness of their tenets and the freedom of the faith they professed. He felt able to understand the broad basis of their religion, purified as it was from the grossness of superstition: and whilst its novelty amused, the ardent and sincere spirit which it breathed coincided with the natural bent of his own disposition.

Instructed and nurtured in this school, it is not surprising that the young Ildegarda became different from the rest of her own age and sex; but in casting off the bigotry which swayed the

actions and opinions of the bulk of society around her, there was, nevertheless, danger to an inexperienced mind. For it is not enough that prejudices should be bad, or opinions erroneous, to authorize their change and abolition—the same effect which is requisite to operate that change, produces too often convulsions both in individuals and in states, which, destroying fixed principles of action, leave the mind exposed to the blind and misleading government of wayward and destructive passions.

It is the hand of experience alone, which possesses the power to direct the tempestuous workings of such a revolution, and the dangers incident to the attempt were not avoided by Ildegarda.

Fortunately for woman, it is the nature of their very weakness when unseduced by sophisticated reasonings, to seek for strength where only it can be found, so that the natural bent of their feelings leads them to piety. Fortunately for

Iidegarda, she possessed this safeguard against the dangers of scepticism, but she fell into the snare of confounding an independent spirit with obstinacy and self-will; for how hard is it to stop at the precise point where the shade of a vice steals on the brilliancy of a virtue!

In addition to the strength of character which the habit of thinking for herself bestowed, one favourite pursuit had sufficed to save her from the trivial follies and insignificance of her sex—the desire of doing good, and of diffusing happiness around her. She followed her father from one domain to another, and to each she carried love and joy. The elastic power of her enthusiastic spirit never deserted her, and her means of other kind appeared to her equally unlimited and exhaustless. Goffredo would point to his hoarded treasures and say—“This, and this, my child, is thine—all thine; do with it as it seems good to thee.” And thus accustomed to the power of riches, she learnt to consider the

advantages which she possessed in that light alone, in which they ought to be considered—she looked upon, and used them as the means of making others happy. In themselves they afforded to her neither delight nor surprise, for she attached no selfish ideas of gratification in the indulgence of vain parade. In other circumstances she would have been different, perhaps; but Ildegarda had no want of accessory greatness. Greatness was hers by birth, and the immediate barter of gold for merchandize, did not come within her speculation. It was a false, delusive state she lived in; false, because the very springs of her beneficence were undervalued by her—but yet did it not exalt the nature of her being? One, and one only circumstance cast its present shadow athwart her path, and marred the felicity of Ildegarda.

Her father, with an anxiety equal to the importance of the object, pressed her to think of marriage, but for its very name Ildegarda felt

unfeigned abhorrence. She viewed a married life in woman as that dependance which she scorned ; she considered it as being too often a sacrifice of the heart's feelings to interest ; she saw its holy state by too many of her sex polluted, and made a cloak for vice, an excuse for licentiousness ; and that pure and free spirit, which governed her every thought and action, bade her beware of a step which exposed her alike to the hazard of such misery, the imputation of such meanness, or the danger of such guilt. Since she had already escaped its bonds in the dismissal of her once betrothed husband Pafetta, the remembrance of the cause which had broken off her engagement became, however falsely, inseparably connected in her mind with all engagements of a similar nature ; and she turned from a contemplation of the subject on every occasion with a feeling of horror, involving in general degradation the holiest and most cherished of all earthly ties.

How often does early disappointment fix a sombre colouring on all our future prospects ! distrust and false estimates of human life are the natural produce of a mind thus blighted in its spring time, while the reason and experience of maturer years can alone convince us of an error so fatal to peace, and show us the many gradations of happiness which we may make our own, even when the first dream of felicity is rudely destroyed.

Ildegarda, however, did not meet her father with positive contradiction or refusal, when the subject, thus become so painful, was pressed upon her ; nor was it indeed ever her habit to do so. When she listened to proposals that were at variance with her own wishes, her dissent was conveyed in a gentle breath, and with a skill which is woman's nature. She turned the tide of his thoughts another way, giving no place to contention or to arguments ; for these, alas ! tear asunder the finer filaments of tender-

ness, those delicate threads which give to affection its most valuable and precious texture, and which, if once rudely destroyed, can scarcely ever be wove together again.

Ildegarda's ardent love for her parent, as well as a deep sense of the duty she owed him in that character, forbade her doing this; but when Goffredo, with more than usual earnestness, dwelt on his wish for her marriage, she would reply—"Far rather, dearest father, would I follow thee in the sports of the chase, or visiting your domains, than be the wife of any husband, by him to become a prisoner within the close walls of some melancholy palace, to work the live-long day on tapestry, or cull simples in a walled garden; to be surrounded by silly maidens, and be made the slave of domestic cares. You cannot wonder, when you have taught me to value other pleasures, and bade me take delight in other objects, that I would fain not follow these. How could I delight thus to occupy

myself, who have loved to hear you, my father, dwell on high themes of conquest and dominion ? 'tis true, I am but woman ; it is true, I turn away from spectacles of blood, and the contemplation of the destroying march of war ; the death even of the noxious animals we hunt down in the chase affords me pain, but still, still I delight in glory, and my heart bounds at the recital of the valorous deeds of chivalry. You taught me thus to feel, dearest father, and can I forget thus to do so ?” “ Thou art my brave, heroic girl,” the old warrior kindling at her words would reply, unmindful how little it suited Ildegarda to indulge in visions of power and rule ; but the words “ you taught me thus to feel,” fell like music on his ear, and led his better reason captive. Thus Ildegarda became more and more his pride, his glory, and he acted but from the persuasive counsels of her will.

Time went on ; the beautiful girl became the perfect woman, and still no prayers could move

her to change her purpose, or win her from her single state. At this epoch of Ildegarda's life, Venice was engaged in endeavouring to make a last Crusade to the Holy Land ; but the torrent of chivalric enthusiasm had spent itself ; the pride of reason took the place of enthusiasm, and calculations depressed the buoyancy of impulses. The attempt was but partially made by a few scattered individuals, whose interested views and monied speculations, rather than their love of fame or glow of piety, instigated them to replace the holy sepulchre in the hands of Christians. The wealth of Goffredo was a rallying point for all adventurers, and the ready ear which the venerable knight lent to any enterprise to which the idea of military glory could be attached, together with the lively interest felt by Ildegarda in every arduous and romantic undertaking, made them both the easy prey of the artful and interested characters who projected this enterprise. Amongst these ad-

venturers, however, there were exceptions; persons of talent and probity, who entered into the cause from motives of the purest zeal, and these Ildegarda selected as objects of preference, with a peculiar keenness of instinctive penetration. But while she and Goffredo thus gained the admiration and gratitude of those whose interests they espoused, they acquired, on the other hand, innumerable enemies.

The swarms of the lower order of ecclesiastics especially, whose frauds were not countenanced by them, and of many, of whose presumptuous miracles they unequivocally denied belief, became their enemies; enemies of no inconsiderable importance. These attacked Goffredo in his most vulnerable part, his fondness for Ildegarda. Those liberal opinions which might be pardoned in him, as an uninstructed and rugged warrior, became, they protested, a heinous offence in one of her sex and youth.— Her love of independence; her reliance upon

her own judgment, as her sole guide in the choice of the objects her charity relieved, by which her contempt of the authority of the priests became evident, were sufficient causes to excite their alarm and remonstrances, and made them determined to check the progress of such dangerous excess of liberty in one whom they considered as their peculiar charge, and whose fatal example might lead others astray.

One instance in particular, the report of which reached the knowledge of the higher authorities of the church, was well calculated to excite a distrust and suspicion of her opinion respecting the true faith. It was on an occasion of a grand solemnity of the priesthood, held in honour of a saint, whose name had recently been admitted into the crowded calendar, but whose title to this apotheosis, the daughter of Gherardesca very heretically questioned, that she had shown in a manner more

decided than heretofore her contempt for the miserable delusions practised on the people. The circumstances which led to the enrolment of Frà Agostino's name in the list of the beatified will best explain Ildegarda's want of respect to his memory.

Frà Agostino was a monk of the order of St. Francis; his wonderful acts of piety had gained him great renown, and his total abstinence from all animal food, (a miracle of itself, amidst the good cheer of convents,) had added considerably to his fame. Worn out, however, by the unwearied diligence of his ministry, and by long and severe penances, the good man at last fell sick, and lay at the point of death. His physicians, knowing his austerity of life, pronounced that without nutritious food to support and invigorate him, nature must soon yield to the want of nourishment, and his valuable life be terminated. But to all their representations Frà Agostino op-

posed his vow, that no animal food should pass his lips. Persisting in his penance, he would quickly have fallen a sacrifice to it, when lo ! as the holy friar rose to partake of his wonted frugal fare, artichokes, fennel, and the like, to which, however, at the earnest entreaty of his brethren, was added a slender portion of fish, there appeared, to the astonishment of the anxious crowd around him, a pullet of fairest whiteness, that seemed miraculously to usurp the platter on which the fish was laid, and to present itself to him ! Mingled joy and wonder seized the brotherhood, who falling on their knees, hailed the sacred viand as sent from Heaven to release him from his vow ; and the good father, no longer able to resist this manifest ordination in his favour, prepared to eat with no ungrateful appetite.

It is needless to say, that the food which so wonderfully appeared to save his life, accomplished its destined purpose in every way,

adding greatly to Frà Agostino's sanctified name, and to the liberty he afterwards enjoyed of partaking of the best of cheer. The testimonies of this miracle, registered and attested in proper form, received, on discharging the fees, the full sanction of the Pontiff's seal; and when at length Agostino paid the debt of nature, he was admitted into the red book of the Vatican, and then permitted to receive in common with many others, and with equal right, his share of well-earned homage. His bones, a valuable treasure which he left behind, and a portion of which, (though we believe he possessed no greater number than his neighbours, yet,) every church in Italy boasted of obtaining, proved a valuable legacy to his convent, and were added to the mass of spiritual weapons employed to compel or terrify an unenlightened multitude to compliance with the wishes of their pastors.

It was a solemnity in honour of this saint, that Ildegarda refused to attend, and with more

sarcasm than prudence, pleaded, as an excuse, the illness of a favourite dog, which at the moment occupied her most anxious care. This excuse was considered, as may well be imagined, contemptuous and insulting in the highest degree towards the fraternity, and as her conduct had already evinced on many other occasions a similar spirit of insubordination and defiance, a deputation of priests waited upon Goffredo to lay the matter in secret before him, and to beseech him for her own sake to represent to his daughter the fatal tendency of her actions, as well as to warn himself that her continuance in such contumely and disrespect, must at last draw down upon him, powerful as was his rank and situation, the dreaded displeasure of the Pontiff. Ildegarda, on her part, laughed at their remonstrance, while she assured this body of reverend fathers, that she knew the Pope to be too courteous to hurl his thunder against a defenceless lady, and that he would rather commend than punish the tenderness of heart which

had kept her absent from the shrine of San Agostino di Tomaso. Her father was too well acquainted with those dissemblers, who wore the mask of religious zeal, to be at any loss how to rid himself of their bold rebukes, and, by giving them money for their community, he affected to be deceived by the specious pretext under which all contributions of the church were levied, and dismissed them, well content.

The storm was thus for the moment hushed, but Ildegarda pursued her wonted line of conduct, unadmonished by what had passed; careless of the recent, as she had been of numberless other reproofs of the same kind, and changed neither her behaviour nor her opinions.—She was by nature wilful, and the opposition she experienced to any of her wishes, made her only more ardent in her pursuit of them; it awoke a proud desire in her for victory; and, therefore, whilst goaded by the interference of these meddling priests, she amused herself in creating dissensions among

them, by giving the preference to one class of ecclesiastics, from whose number she chose a confidential adviser and friend. Meanwhile, misfortune of a more immediate nature, threatened the happiness of Ildegarda—her father's health began to decline, and warned her with melancholy presage of a separation, which the law of Nature condemns us to endure, but which it can never teach us to look forward to without pain. She had now many wayward humours to soothe, and many wearisome hours to beguile, in her parent's declining existence. Whether this circumstance threw a gloom over the society of Goffredo, and that Ildegarda's undivided attention to him gave her less means of contributing to the pleasures of those who had hitherto made the palace their constant resort, or whether the serious alarm arising from the professed opinions of its owner, were the cause of disaffection in their acquaintance and followers, it is difficult to say ; but Ildegarda saw the throng which had been used to gather

round her, and to form a circle at once powerful from its influence, and brilliant from its talent, wholly dispersed. Although she scorned the motive, and in some degree the characters of those persons who could thus be influenced, still she felt a pang at their desertion; a mortification, that in the midst of power is often secretly experienced; a latent conviction; that we are ourselves nothing to the generality of our acquaintance—that we owe to adventitious circumstances alone, the homage we receive; and that not even wealth or power, and far less talent or worth, can command the smiles of fashion, or the caprices of mankind. The women,—for women of talent will still be women,—thought they discovered Ildegarda's dress to be wild and fantastic, that she was not of matchless beauty, and that there was a crowd of persons hovering about her, whose talents and intellectual qualities were their

-

only merit, but to whom she paid as much, if not more deference, than to themselves, who were the noble of the land. The men discovered Goffredo to be old and silly, one who was falling into second childhood, and whispered their apprehensions, that both himself and his daughter were doing much harm, and would effect changes prejudicial to their interests. Ildegarda would have felt this loss of popularity and consideration more painfully, had her mind not been absorbed in the duties of ministering to her father's growing infirmities; but notwithstanding this circumstance, there were hours when the change in her worldly situation would present itself in all its gloom to her consideration, and weigh heavily on her heart.

These painful feelings arose not entirely from wounded pride or disappointed ambition, but from motives more noble, proceeding from

the conviction thus forced upon her, of the meanness and ingratitude of those on whom her hopes and expectations had been built; and a consequent despair of being able, by her influence, to effect any substantial public good. Another deeper source of unhappiness was felt by her in the void which her heart experienced: there were around her those who flattered, who admired her, but not one who felt strictly in unison with her; not one who was capable of entering into her views with feelings congenial to her own, or whose mind was so far freed from the trammels of prejudice, as to dare explore the themes on which she meditated day and night—the freedom of her country, and its emancipation from the state of humiliating degradation in which she beheld it plunged. One evening, when her father had retired to rest, she sought her favourite terrace, and gazing on the setting sun, her enthusiastic fancy caught the reflection of its glory. She

called to remembrance the greatness of the land of her birth—its genius—its unrivalled taste—its light of literature—its endless resources—its climate—its powers of fascination—its painting, and its poetry. And to what pure region above the earth did she seem raised while under this exciting influence ! But the natural sun sunk down, and the moral sun, too, became obscured, and the dark side of things presented itself by contrast in still denser obscurity to her mind. Her intense sense of self-debasement, in that of the moral and constitutional degradation of the land of her fathers, clouded her magnificent brow ; yet it was something to indulge these feelings unchecked in solitude : for how often had they, when expressed, been dashed back upon herself by some cold calculating reasoning brought in action against her inspiring hopes, or been mocked by a smile of sceptic contempt ? “ No,” she thought, “ there is no heart that beats with mine, save my dear fa-

ther's—and soon, how soon that may be stilled for ever !” At this idea her feelings quickly flowed in another channel, and the cold chill of reversed emotion crept through her veins. “ My child,” uttered a gentle voice, “ *Fanciulla* ! (that endearing sound, in which the Italian language speaks so sweetly to the sense, and falls like music on the ear,) *Fanciulla*, why do you weep ?” “ I was unconscious that I wept,” said Ildegarda, turning to her favourite Camaldolese ; “ tears are rare with me—I often wish they were not so ; there is a stifling of the breath they might relieve ; but these big drops that obscure my sight are, I fear, the forerunners of gloom and tempest, not the soft showers that succeed the storm. I have been thinking of many things ; of my country—of my father—of myself. The glory of the one has set in darkness, and the gloom of sorrow and degradation overhangs this once bright and noble land. My father—oh, misery ! the light of

his declining sun is sinking fast too ! and for myself, why should I remain ? worthless, insignificant that I am, to cumber this spot of earth with my existence !” “ Why do you thus pursue shadows, and then mourn that they elude your grasp ? why call before you phantoms, and then speculate upon the appalling forms which they present, as though they were indeed embodied evils ? why seek for sorrow earlier than she need be found ? Your country is not what it might be ; but there is more of bliss in it nevertheless, than in half the other nations upon earth. Though the children of its soil be impoverished, though they be crushed by the tyrant and vexed by the stranger, they go forth into their fields, and the very beauty around that meets them, the very earth itself which they tread, luxuriant in its produce and smiling in plenty, bids them forget their wrongs. True, they reason not upon these beauties—they do not analyze the cause of their contentment ; but

content they are, and their happiness is the less troubled from being the less reasoned upon. For your father—ah ! gentle soul, there I feel all that you can feel : but we are forbidden to anticipate our griefs, or by untimely sorrow to lose the power of fulfilling present duties. When this blow shall fall, you may indeed mourn, but the consolation of having been a good and tender child will be yours ; and Providence orders that, in the common course of events, parents depart before their offspring. Happy is it when the law of nature is not reversed ! It is our part to bow resignedly to the pain, and time heals the wounds which resist every other remedy. As to yourself, my child, you are highly gifted ; you are neither worthless nor insignificant—none of God's creatures can properly be said to be so : they have all their allotted stations to fill, and form a part of that vast system of creation, which, though sometimes beyond our finite understandings to ac-

count for, a pious and well-ordered mind still knows must be right : some persons, indeed, may make themselves worthless, but God never made them so. That you are an exception you ought not to think, and though it is well for you to feel that you are surrounded by dangers as the first safeguard and security against them, yet, in your instance, the greatest of all dangers are of your own creating. Trust me, my child, moderate your wishes, employ the power you possess (and it is not small) in doing all the good you *can* ; but no longer, I entreat, indulge your imagination in speculative theories, whose only tendency will be to render you miserable, by the disappointment they will bring with them."

Ildegarda assented to the truth of this counsel ; but the idea that she might be destined to forward the great end of restoring her country to its liberties and glory—that she might be the means of ameliorating the condition of its

citizens, and of advancing intellectual and moral improvement, to that standard of perfection which she had established in her own mind, was too bright an illusion to be resigned, while youth and hope, and the ardent feeling of enterprise glowed in her bosom in their first unblighted vigour. Her friend continued: "That free government, of which you dream, must be the work of more than one individual; it must be, if ever it is to be, the fruit of time; the united efforts of congregated bodies of men, who even then must leave the work unfinished to their children's children; but——"

"Granted," interrupted Ildegarda impatiently, "but if no one commence, how can the work be prosecuted, or conducted to an end? You are aware, that there are many at this moment, imbued with the noble spirit fit for this glorious enterprize: a restless desire to break the bonds of the slavery which oppresses burns within them. They only want some

one to lead them on, and be their rallying point ! some one whose wealth could aid, whose influence might give nerve and sinew to their efforts. Why, good father, why might I not aspire to this office—so high and so illustrious ? I feel the ardent impulse which bids me forward to aid it by every means within my power. And, oh ! what would I not do for thee, my poor loved country !”

“Lady !” interrupted Fredolfo, laying his hand gently on her arm, “Cease, I beseech you. I will weep for you—pray for you—implore you ; but I must not listen to the wild and stormy projects of your enthusiastic fancy ! My path lies by the waters of peace and rest : I would allay the fever of your mind, but must not partake its aberrations ; nor can I listen to subjects so intimately connected, so strictly interwoven with all those rules and laws which my duty calls on me to respect and guard inviolate. I must entreat your pardon ;

I must withdraw myself from a discussion which it would pain me to prolong." Ildegarda followed him with her eyes, as he walked with quick and perturbed step away. "And you also," she said mournfully, "*you*, even *you* forsake and leave me in doubt, whether it be some good or evil angel which propels me in my path." Ildegarda was not happy.

CHAPTER II.

A CONTINUATION OF ILDEGARDA'S LIFE, HER PASTIMES AND DELIGHTS.

Malice seldom invents ; she exercises a more refined cruelty, by raising accusation on some one admitted fact, indifferent perhaps in itself, but which, being perverted, is made to assume the semblance of guilt. It is harder for innocence to explain than refute ; when something is conceded as true, *more* than what *is* true, will always be suspected or believed.

Dr. Nott's Life of Sir Thomas Wyatt.

GOFFREDO died—died without performing the last ceremonial rites of the church ; and it was confidently reported that a figure clad in scarlet was seen to ascend through the roof of his castle at the moment his soul took its departure ; which figure disappeared suddenly in

a sulphureous cloud: no money was given to the neighbouring convents, that masses might be sung for the deceased, and it was decided in consequence that it could not have fared well with his spirit. Story grew on story: at length it was related, with many circumstances which gave weight to the tale, that a large tract of land, not far from Goffredo's Volterranean possessions, had become the prey of sorcerers and demons, who were nightly seen by the terrified spectators, walking about in the midst of flames, that sported to and fro over the earth, and that in short the whole country would soon be rendered uninhabitable if the Castle of Gherardesca was not rased to the earth.

In the first months of sorrow she whom these relations most concerned, gave no heed to them whatever; but when a lapse of time had restored her to tranquillity, she threatened the bearers of these idle tales with her heaviest

displeasure, if they continued to repeat them ; “for they are,” she added, “injurious to the memory of my departed parent, disrespectful to myself, and disgraceful to common sense.” “Ay, that common sense will be the ruin of you,” uttered Maestrillo the Fool, as he went out from her presence ; “that name is ever in my lady’s mouth. One would think he was some saint of power, and I declare I never heard of him, though I have the whole catalogue by heart. *Eh ! che vi pare !* was ever fish turned into a fowl for him?”

The death of Goffredo had plunged his daughter into the deepest sorrow—a sorrow, which, though the keen edge of its anguish had passed away, still continued its influence over her heart. Ildegarda had obtained none of those novel accessions of power, or wealth, or liberty, which too often blunt the edge of natural grief, in the moment of their acquirement ; for she had possessed the full enjoyment

of all these in her father's lifetime, and therefore she experienced by his death the loss only of that sympathy in her feelings and ideas which she had met with from him alone. Ildegarda was unlike the generality of women; not from any silly or affected love of eccentricity, but from the peculiar circumstances in which she was situated. These were all calculated to give her character that stamp of originality which placed her, as it were, on an eminence of melancholy superiority; from whence she could not descend to taste of humbler or more common pleasures, but which in itself did not confer happiness. How could it? for, though her mind grasped at the immensity of the outstretched prospect before her, her heart remained unoccupied, a desert territory. "I am monarch of all I survey," might she have exclaimed with the cast-away, and with a sense of no less desolation;—but to whom are all things given? It is wisdom, it is virtue, to enjoy what is be-

stowed; to make the endeavour even confers a species of happiness. Much of mortal happiness necessarily springs from exertion. To sigh and repine for what is not within our reach, is the self-creation of misery. Ildegarda was guilty of this folly; and who was ever entirely and at all times exempt from it? “Why was I born an Italian?” she would impatiently exclaim; “or, being so born, why were other thoughts awakened within me than those of the generality of my sex, who lead a life of empty pleasure; flutter in the sunbeam of youth and beauty, and then sink to old age and death, unreverenced and unremembered?” As Ildegarda spake, she saw, at a distance, her once favourite friend, the Camaldolese, (*once favourite*, for a length of time had elapsed without his having sought or conversed with her,) walking to and fro, as though he wished to approach, yet durst not. Since their last interview on the terrace, there had been a tacit knowledge in both that the one had of-

fended, and the other had been offended, yet neither of them would make the first advance towards a reconciliation. Ildegarda's heart, however, could not long retain a sentiment of anger, and it bounded with a feeling of delight to which she had long been a stranger, on recognizing her friend. An impulse of generous kindness got the better of false pride; she advanced to meet him with that quickness of step, and glow of good-will beaming in her countenance, which tells at once that the heart loves to forget its coldness.

“’Tis long since I have seen you,” she said; “it is most pleasant to meet you again. I had expected you would have come to me when I was in affliction, and I felt your absence was unkind; but perhaps—” She stopped and coloured; for she was conscious that her own wilfulness and contemptuous behaviour had alone estranged him from her society. “Lady,” he answered, “I see your candour has pleaded my apology; no more of that subject at this moment; though

it will be my duty, at a future period, to represent to you once again (and for the last time) the danger and impropriety of your conduct. But I come now with the hope of interesting you in a story, the investigation of which may both direct your mind into another channel, and be of service to your temporal interests. May I be permitted to make it known to you?"

Ildegarda's eager assent was followed by the Frate's narration.—

“ Two children of the valley of Cecina dwelt with their mother, a poor woman of the lowest extraction, who resides, or did reside, in the mountainous district beyond Volterra. They were sent by her, a long time ago, entrusted with a message and a gift to a vine-dresser, who lives close to your palace. The gift consisted of a cheese, the product of the goats they tended, and a young whelp of a particular species of dog, famous for its sagacity and fidelity in guarding the flocks it is educated to watch

over. The boy and girl took charge of their embassy and presents; and furnished with a sufficient provision of beans and dried grapes to refresh them on their little journey, they set forth with light steps and light hearts, for they were proud to be entrusted with matters (which appeared to them to be) of such consequence. It was the middle of December, and the cold *mistrale* blew from the Appenines with unusual keenness; nevertheless the little travellers continued to beguile their way by the pleasure of exercise, by having recourse to an occasional supply of the refreshments they carried with them, and by their own innocent converse. But the sky grew darker and darker, and when they had reached half way to the place of their destination, they were covered, with what to them seemed a prodigy; for in their short lives they had only once seen a snow-storm, when a general festivity prevailed, and holidays were given to children, as if the season of frost and snow were

a time to rejoice in. The flakes now fell faster and faster, and melted not as they fell, but covered the face of the earth with a white and glittering sheet. At length a sentiment of terror came over the children, and made them pause: they looked anxiously around,—‘It is a very white rain,’ said the little girl, endeavouring to cheer her companion, ‘only see how it dances and skips about, here is a tuft of it like feathers.’ ‘But it is very cold,’ answered Edoardo, and he began to weep. His tears affected his sister; she could no longer conceal her own alarm; ‘But (said she afterwards, in relating her little story) ‘I did not let him know how much I was terrified, and how near I was lying down and crying too, in despair of assistance.’ Then looking anxiously about, she beheld, to her great joy, at some little distance from the road, a small chapel dedicated to the Virgin, in which she hoped to find a shelter. The little Rachaela’s account of her scruples at

entering into this holy place from any motive save that of prayer, was extremely touching. 'But at last,' she said, 'I saw my brother completely covered with a sort of shining white crust, and I thought he would soon be hid altogether from my eyes, if I did not shelter him as quickly as possible.' Then she described the difficulty she had in climbing up a slippery pointed rock with the cheese, the dog, and the little Edoardo; her subsequent delight at finding herself, together with all these objects of her care, safely housed, and the thousand times that she repeated 'Blessed be the holy Virgin!' making her brother repeat it too, although his teeth chattered so as to make his words scarcely intelligible. But this relief was only temporary; for, though sheltered above from the falling snow, nothing could screen them from the intense cold; which as night drew on became more and more severe, and was peculiarly painful to children unused to the

rigour of so piercing an atmosphere. The little boy grew clamorous in his complaints, and wept till his sister's heart was nigh broken. She would fain, she related, have sat down and cried with him, but again she remembered that that would do no good, and turned in her mind what might possibly be of service ; so she despoiled herself of part of her clothes in order to wrap her brother in them, and she had shortly afterwards the satisfaction of seeing him lulled into comparative comfort and repose. But thus deprived of great part of her clothing, the agony of extreme cold made her think that death had already seized her. ' I could not pray properly,' said the innocent Rachaela, ' for no one had ever taught me to pray ; but in my distress I called upon the name of God, and was strengthened.' The little dog lay at a distance from me : it came into my head that he would warm me, so I placed him across my breast, and the heat of his body made me so comforta-

ble, that I knew nothing more till I awoke the next day.' Well, signora, when the poor children opened their eyes, what was their dismay to behold, in a glittering sunlight, nothing of all they had seen before—nothing but one vast sheet of dazzling brightness which covered every object save the tops of the trees. No track of road remained, no trace of any thing which could guide them on their way. They looked at each other in mute astonishment, and at last Edoardo piteously exclaimed, 'We shall never get home again, and I am so hungry!' 'What shall we do?' said Rachaela mournfully; 'the beans and dried grapes too are eaten.' 'Oh! but the cheese,' quickly rejoined her brother, 'the cheese, let us eat that.' 'The cheese you know, dear Edoardo, is safe, but it is not our own; we were entrusted with it, and we must not eat it; indeed, indeed we must not break our promise—it is better to die with hunger than to do that!'

“The difficulty this little heroine had in pacifying her brother was very great; and it may be doubted whether she would not have yielded her strong sense of honour to the calls of hunger, had not a powerful sunshine come in aid of her resolution, which, by melting the looser part of the snow, discovered many bushes and briers, from whose friendly branches she gathered various berries, that for the moment satisfied their craving appetite.

“Thus refreshed, and the road becoming here and there again visible, they once more proceeded on their way; but they had not gone far, when a quantity of drifted snow completely barred their progress—the skies again lowered, and a fresh storm came on. In vain they attempted to retrace their steps to the shelter of the preceding night; wearied and terrified, they sunk down on the ground, in utter hopelessness. The arrowy sleet blew directly in their eyes; the piercing wind chilled their blood, and they

thought only of death. Again the little Edoardo appealed piteously to his sister for the cheese. ‘Not yet, dear brother; God may help us yet in some other way. You know, the cheese was made, with much trouble and cost, purposely for Francesco, who has been so very good to us and to Marinella; and we have no way of repaying him, except by giving him this cheese:—indeed, indeed, we must not eat of it, till we are starving.’—‘But I am starving,’ cried the little boy. Once more Rachaela pacified him by saying, she was sure, that, seeing the snow-storm, Marinella would be alarmed for their safety, and would seek for them and save them.

“In soothing and reasoning with others, it chances oft that we are soothed and rendered rational ourselves; and thus it fared with Rachaela. But still the snow came down faster and faster, and it was in vain that she worked wildly with her hands to prevent its settling

upon her brother's face and head ; when shortly a mass of loosened snow, blown from a height, completely buried the children within its bosom. To this circumstance, terrible as it appeared, they owed their lives ; and a merciful Providence rendered it the means of preserving them, when all mortal aid seemed vain. Relieved from the piercing effects of the outward air, Rachaela had power once more to think of prayer, and she repeated the great name of Him who is able to save to the uttermost, till at length she felt her voice die away, and she was no longer able to articulate. At this juncture, a joyful sound of footsteps, accompanied with loud halloos, came to her listening ear, mingled with repeated cries of her own and Edoardo's name : nearer and more near they came, till they reached the very spot where the children were lying. Rachaela endeavoured to speak ; she could not utter : she tried to awaken her brother in vain ; he was sunk in the sleep which precedes death. The

dog! the dog alone remained able to save them. roused by the noise, the animal barked perpetually: and, oh! the joy to poor Rachaela's heart, when she distinguished that those who sought them were guided by his voice to remove the snow that covered them. The remainder of the story may be shortly related: every thing had been prepared which could be deemed necessary to comfort, cheer, and revive the lost ones; and they were conveyed homewards on panniers swung across a mule.

“ Rachaela was soon sufficiently recovered to speak, and told her story in an artless manner, that touched all hearts, except (strange to say!) the heart of her it ought most to have affected: but Marinella, instead of commending her for that nice sense of honour and fidelity, which made her so tenacious of her trust, chided her roughly for not having given the cheese immediately to Edoardo, as if wholly regardless of the principle of duty and fidelity which Nature

had implanted in the heart of that sweet child. ‘I wonder,’ muttered this strange being, “what business *she* had to refuse *him*? What signifies a woman’s life? Women are born to wretchedness: it matters not whether they live or die: happiest are those who soonest pass away from their misery. I would have every third woman strangled in the birth. But men, men in truth, have something worth living for in this world.’ ‘Why did you not go then yourself, old croaking crone, with your messages, instead of sending these poor babes, and making slaves of them, as you do on all occasions?’ rejoined one of the persons who had come to assist in finding the children. ‘Hush!’ cried the rest, gathering round the speaker, and whispering to him, ‘do not offend her:—Marinella, you know, is not one of us:’ and they shook their heads significantly. To this observation more attention and credence was given, when, putting a few soldi into the hands of each man whom she had

called upon to aid her in the search, she bade them begone, in a tone and with a gesture of command, they did not feel disposed to disobey ; then, seizing the bridle of the mule, she hurried it away, with a pace of no common swiftness.

“ Nothing more has been heard of these children since the vine-dresser related the story to me as an event which happened six years ago ; ‘ but,’ he added, with a countenance expressive of alarm and misgiving, ‘ such strange sights are seen, and such unusual sounds are heard, in the wild part of the country where they are said to have lived, that no one ever passes by that way after dark,—they had rather travel miles about, than run such risk. And I fancy your friends at the Palazzo Gherardesca can tell you something about it, since Marinella is seen gliding in and out there at all hours ; and you know, *caro frate*, that, since Goffredo’s death, there has been little peace in the country ; nor will there, so long as that castle stands where

it does.'” The *frate* ceased speaking, and awaited Ildegarda’s observations with anxiety, on the story he had related. During its narration, she had evinced a deep and pleased interest, till in the latter part, when her father’s name had been mentioned, as she thought, with a want of due respect, and the clouds of displeasure gathered upon her brow.

When the narrative was ended, she merely said, “ Such is the baneful effects of superstition, and pardon me if I may add of priestcraft. Thus is every action which rises above the common level, misrepresented by the folly or wickedness of men, who find it their interest to crush or conceal from public notice every one likely to become of more consequence than themselves.” Then pausing, she recovered her equanimity ; and shortly after questioned Fredolfo as to his meaning in saying that this story might afford her an opportunity of silencing evil speakers, and advancing her tem-

poral interests, while, at the same time, she would be doing an act of charity. “Lady, I meant simply this: if you investigate the above relation thoroughly, and go yourself to that part of the country whence these idle reports have their origin, you will probably find that the flames and sulphureous exhalations do really exist, but are phœnomena of Nature; and that all the rest of the supernatural adjuncts are merely fabrications of the terrified and unlettered peasantry. As to Marinella, her treatment of Rachaela seems to bespeak her a worthless character; and it will be well to detect and expose one who is probably the fabricator of all the tales which thus offend you. In themselves they are beneath notice, I allow; but, considering the temper of the times in which we live, and the enemies who surround you, they demand your serious attention.” Ildegarda did not immediately reply; but after an interval of silence, hav-

ing thanked her friend for his kind suggestion, she withdrew to reflect upon his words. The lively interest with which his account of the children had inspired her, was not likely to die away. "It does me good," she said, pursuing her reflections, "to know that, in unsophisticated natures, there does exist such a principle of integrity as the little Rachaela evinced; and shall I not seek her out, foster and cherish her?" But then again there arose a repelling sentiment of suspicion in her mind; for Ildegarda had learnt that terrible lesson of experience which teaches to suspect latent evil under seeming good—a melancholy price, which is too often paid for knowledge of the world; and she conceived that some superstitious rites might be deemed necessary—some ceremonies of exorcisms be forced upon her by those who should accompany her to the place of imaginary terror, where the objects of her search were said to dwell.

To suffer this would be to give sanction to those falsehoods which the malice and calumniating spirit of her enemies had already spread abroad. The fact was, that Fredolfo had long known the awful stigma of heresy was attached to her name; and, unless she could disprove some of the circumstances which it was said unbelief had brought upon her, he foresaw that she would probably be involved in utter ruin. Fredolfo's intentions were always friendly, pure, and disinterested towards Ildegarda, as those of a parent; but the wilfulness of her character was her stumbling-block, and she rarely listened to his counsels. The desire, however, which she felt to see Rachaela and Edoardo, got the better, on this occasion, of the disingenuous and less amiable resolutions which she would otherwise perhaps have formed. Accordingly, sending for Fredolfo, she said to him: "I desire that, if these children of whom you have spoken to me are to be found, you will faci-

litate and procure for me an interview with them : yet stay," she added ; " I would rather go myself in quest of them ; there is no messenger so sure on any embassy as one's-self. If there were fewer delegated authorities, there would be less injustice ; and miscarriages, in the conduct of affairs, would be of rarer occurrence.

Frate Fredolfo encouraged this determination ; and she fixed the following day for her excursion, commanding him to be in readiness to attend her. " Most willingly," was the Frate's reply ; " but," hesitating he added, " will it not be better, lady, that we have some of my brethren likewise ?" " Wherefore, good Frate ?" and then, not waiting his answer : " Oh ! you know you dare not tell me wherefore !" — " Lady," he said, " there is safety in a multitude." — " But not in a multitude of priests !" rejoined Ildegarda, " No, no ; you are my friend, (laughing) but not my confessor !

though you are believed to be such. You, and you only, of your brethren shall accompany me, with some of my own attendants; but I will have no church processions—no nonsense!” Fredolfo looked distressed, but withdrew in silence.

The admiration Ildegarda felt for the character of the little Rachaella grew upon her, the more she reflected on the trait of genuine worth related of her. Her imagination kindled at the thought of such native heroism; and she determined that, if the children were still alive, she would discover their abode, and attach them to her service. To will and to do were one and the same thing with Ildegarda. Fortunately her will had hitherto sprung always from a noble impulse; and, although it had borne her far on a sea of trouble, it had never yet induced her to make shipwreck of integrity or principle:—still she was like the mariner who dares a perilous voyage, without helm or compass to guide him in his course. The system which in theory

she disclaimed, she frequently upheld in practice, without being aware that she did so:—in short, she was absolute, she was impetuous, and consequently liable to great error.

Ildegarda now busied herself in making arrangements for her proposed expedition: she gave all the directions, and took a pleasure, unusual with her, in entering into the details of the preparations. She ordered her finest mules to be in readiness, her favourite barb richly caparisoned, and sumpter, beasts to convey various refreshments, and likewise vestments of gay and costly apparel—every thing, in short, by which she thought to win Marinella's consent to her attaching the children to her service.

Ildegarda was ready for her departure long before any of her train. They pleaded her own orders for an hour not yet arrived; while she declared they had mistaken her injunctions, and that the hour she had appointed was long since passed.

At length the cavalcade were assembled : Ildegarda stood ready to mount her black Arabian ; Fredolfo his white mule ; her poet, and her painter, Zanobi, and Cino, took their stations immediately behind her, with a long line of serving-men in their rear, amongst whom the jester or fool Maestrillo, and her favourite page Bruno Grillo, were most conspicuous. Bruno Grillo was a dwarf of deformed figure : but he had a peculiar claim to her favour ; for he was her foster-brother, and owed the misfortune of his untoward shape to the carelessness of an hireling nurse, to whom his mother consigned him when she suckled the infant Ildegarda. From this circumstance, both herself, and Goffredo her father, had in consequence made him more peculiarly the object of their protection ; and Bruno Grillo, by sharing the education of his mistress, was worthy of being beloved by her ever afterwards with the affection of a sister. Such was the party who now

stood ready to obey Ildegarda's signal of departure. The voice of Maestrillo first broke forth. "It is proper," he cried, in a shrill, discordant tone, before even his mistress was seated on her steed—"it is proper that a fool should be first on a fool's errand: so, by your leave, Illustrissima, and with all due respect, allow me to be, on this occasion, one step before my liege lady; I shall not go far:" and on he passed, singing as he went—

"That dogs before their masters go,
The reason would you find;
'Tis plainly, when, I'd have you know,
The masters go behind.

"That's a pretty song, when it's well sung."
"Stay, stay," cried Radegunda, running out with *frittura* and *rosolio*, "how can you think of going away unprovided with the chiefest dainty in the world, to faint on the road, perhaps, without a drop of *stimolante* to keep up your spirits! And my beauteous nursling, and

my own sweet boy there: what is to become of them, without their old Radegunda's care? There, Francia; here, take this basket and these flasks. Mercy! what would you all do, I say, were it not for me?—There, do not break the bottles; and be wary, sweet hearts: now do not go too fast, remember *Chi va piano va sano*. You know the rest.—A word in season. Poor Radegunda will be counting the hours till you come back. Mercy on me! look sharp after that horse: how he pricks up his ears, and twirls about his eyes; while his nostrils play more like a pair of bellows than any thing else! I have heard that at this time of the year, the flies make the horses very skittish. There! now, San Ranieri protect me, if he has not sent all the foam of his mouth over my best silk hood.”

“Enough, enough, good Radegunda,” said her mistress impatiently, “we shall do nothing but take care of ourselves, depend upon that.”

Bruno Grillo, in the meanwhile, had spread the mantle of honour on the ground, on which the well-trained barb of Ildegarda bent its knees to receive its beauteous burden. The rest of the party leapt, or scrambled as best they could, upon their several steeds, and the whole cavalcade set gaily forth.

CHAPTER III.

ILDEGARDA FINDS A FRIEND.

For all the loveliness, and light, and bloom,
That yet are thine, surviving many a storm,
Are but as Heaven's warm radiance on the tomb !
The rose's blush that masks the canker worm :
And thou art desolate !—thy morn hath pass'd,
So dazzling in the splendour of its way,
That the dark shades the night hath o'er thee cast,
Throw tenfold gloom around thy deep decay.
Once proud in freedom, still in ruin fair,
Thy fate hath been unmatch'd in glory and despair !

Modern Greece, by Mrs. Hemans.

THE shades of night were not yet entirely scattered by the sun ; the freshness of the first breath of Nature still rested upon leaf and flower, and these, as if in grateful return, sent forth that

mingled odour of undefined sweetness, which acts powerfully upon the senses of the higher beings in creation. The chasms and rents of the surrounding country of Volterra formed a curious fretwork on the surface of the ground, over which an endless variety of shadows began to dart their mysterious and ever-shifting forms; long lines of darkness were opposed to the brightest hues of light, and the pearly tints of the West were beautifully contrasted with the broad golden blaze of the coming day.

Ildegarda, for the first time since her father's death, felt a renovation of enjoyment. Alive to the charms of Nature, excited by curiosity, and those vague expectations of delight, which health and youth and romance never fail to inspire, she journeyed on for many hours without being conscious of fatigue; at length she drew up her horse under the shade of a cluster of ilexes, to the no small joy of some of her followers, whose imaginations were not proof against the realities

of hunger and weariness. "Prepare our repast," she said: "methinks we shall all fare the better for refreshment."—Fare!" rejoined Maestrillo; "I should have bid you farewell for ever, if I had not soon some comforting cheer to keep life and soul together." During this grumbling speech the active little Bruno Grillo was at his mistress's side, ready to hold her horse's reins; and then Maestrillo hastened to cast himself on the ground, that Ildegarda might place her foot on him as she alighted. "The earth is not worthy of your footstep," he said pompously. "Messer Zanobi, I am not the first fool who has mistaken his trade; but indeed a fool's business is every body's business; otherwise, why are you not on the alert with your words and your wiles? Where are your ladies the Muses? Methinks they cast their servants often in the mire. Now I hold it better for the servant to cast himself in the mire, than to let any mistress do it for him."

“Maestrillo, thou wantest not words, at least such as they are; and if quantity made amends for quality, thou wouldest not easily be passed over: as it is, thou art answered thus:”—and Ildegarda leapt lightly from her steed, disregarding his speeches and his services. Messer Zanobi was aroused from a reverie by the address which had just been made; and, coming forward, declared most innocently that he was not thinking about any thing present. “I did not call you,” rejoined Ildegarda, smiling at the compliment; “it was this fool Maestrillo who disturbed your contemplations.”

“Say that again, I beseech you, Messer Poet,” cried Maestrillo, regardless of his mistress’s observation,—“say that again, in order that, when I am at a loss for a polite speech, I may have it in readiness. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what a topsy-turvy world this is, where I am called a fool, and he is called a poet.”

“Cease prating, Maestrillo, and come all my

good friends, to partake of the banquet, which Bruno Grillo is so busily preparing; and then, being refreshed, let each contribute a share of his wits to the amusement of the hour."

"And as I have no wits," cried Maestrillo, "my only business will be to eat and drink,—that 's good!"

Cushions were now placed for Ildegarda, and pieces of tapestry laid for the rest of the company. It was a pleasant sight to see them with their gay habiliments, grouped under the dark illexes, and forming a fine object in the foreground of the beautiful picture that lay outspread before them: except a quarrel which took place between the dwarf and the fool, as to which of them should serve their mistress, all was harmony; and this little contention was soon allayed by Ildegarda's declining the services of either.

"If this be the case, lady, you must learn to know whose service you have disclaimed," said Maestrillo, drawing out his lean, long figure to

a length almost incredible ; then, laying his hand on his heart, he recited his string of titles, which lasted while he had breath to utter them ; and at length, to the relief of his auditors, they concluded thus :

Arm of iron, heart of fire,
Sword that ne'er would flinch or tire,
Lord of valour, peerless worth,
She who gave the Phœnix birth,
Made him knight of rueful face,
And dubb'd him lord of ladies' grace.

“ Who is a poet now, prithee ? Crown me with bells—no, give him, Zanobi, there the bells, and crown me the poet for evermore.” “ A truce, I beseech thee, with thy talking ; begone, drink this and be silent,” filling him a goblet of wine ; “ we are wearied of thy fooleries.”—“ And yet, if all fools, lady, were sent away from company, I wonder where the company would be.”—“ Bruno Grillo, I pray thee, stop the mouth of thy comrade, and take him into thy keeping.”—“ My

keeping ? ” said Bruno Grillo, lifting up his beautiful face, which seemed not to belong to his low and deformed figure. “ It is my misfortune that ever I am condemned to sit at board with such an one. Lady, I would serve thee willingly, and do all thy bidding, late and early, without murmur or complaint ; but to be the jest-stock of such an illiterate varlet ! Oh, lady, I see I must leave thee at last.” And here the poor little Bruno Grillo strove in vain to conceal his emotion. “ Be pacified, I pray thee, mine own good page,” said Ildegarda mildly, “ and make not this day, which I have set apart for pleasure, a time of such unseemly broils. Maestrillo, I command you to respect my servant Bruno Grillo : and thou, Bruno, forgive Maestrillo ; he is but a fool.”—“ Ay, ay, if it must be so, it must,—the but is hard to swallow, only ’tis a hard morsel that will resist a hungry man ; and so, good Bruno, (lifting him on his shoulders,) come thy way ; and, since it must be, I will not only gulp

thee down, but thy shoulders' hillock into the bargain. Peace being thus enforced, and refreshment taken, Messer Cino came forward with an offering of his art. "Here is a design I have been making, to commemorate this day; what think you of it, Illustrissima? Without your approbation I shall not myself approve of it." "Beware of flattery," cried Ildegarda; "you know it is unsaleable merchandise with me." "I spake the truth, Eccellenza, for I have observed often that there was a justice in your remark upon works of art, that I have seldom met with in one who did not practise the art themselves. There is no petty criticism of detached parts in your eye when it looks on any of our works, but it takes in the general feeling which the artist intended to convey; and although the means by which that feeling produced its effect, may not be understood by you in its mechanical operation, yet in the success or failure of the conception itself I have seldom

seen you mistaken." Flattery takes so many shapes, it is difficult always to detect it. Ildergarda enjoyed this praise so pleasantly presented to her, with her own genuine *bonhomie* of feeling. They do err who say they like not flattery ; it is the mode, and not the matter, that is offensive. Gazing intently on the Abozza, Ildergarda smiled as she said, "It were to belie what you have been asserting in respect to my judgment, did I not acknowledge the truth and beauty of what I now behold. Yet, to prove to you that I am always sincere, and can find fault, as well as admire at random, it may be ; but still that I *can* do both, I will now remark in this charming work, even at the risk of betraying ignorance, and observe that the figures are rather stiff in their positions, and want the freedom of nature and of life ; this is all the defect I can find out." "*Per Bacco !*" exclaimed Messer Cino, with his accustomed oath, "how right she is ! The position of the figures must

be changed, totally changed. Give me one hour, a painter's hour, lady ; and, if I do not ask too much of your gracious patience, please to resume your places : I feel that I shall do better." This request was the more readily granted, as it became necessary to find some peasant of the district, to direct the party in the road they ought to pursue, for the spot they sought lay over a wild tract of country, little frequented but by goatherds and their flocks. "While we are waiting," said Ildegarda, "for a guide, you, Messer Cino, shall retouch your work ; you, Fredolfo, shall rest from fatigue ; you, Maestrillo, shall hold your tongue ; you, Bruno Grillo, count these pearls," as she took a string from her arm, "and tell me how much money they will fetch you ; and you, Messer Zanobi, if your fancy so incline you, may tune your lute in praise of love or glory."

"Ah !" cried Bruno Grillo, kissing the pearls, "I do not ask gold from you, my mistress, but

favour and countenance ; what else have I, disgraced by nature as I am, but the grace of your favour to reconcile me to my unhappy fate."

" Good Bruno, be not so childish ; rest assured that I have much pleasure in your service, and good-will ; and do not allow Maestrillo's jeers to affect your spirits."

Now Bruno Grillo bowed low, and withdrew behind Ildegarda, while he caressed her favourite dog, and Maestrillo, with rueful countenance, placed his finger on his lips, while Messer Zanobi proceeded to obey her commands also ; and Cino Cenini to retouch his picture.

Zanobi paused for a moment over his lute, and having given one poet's look to earth and heaven, he said, " This is your song, Bruno Grillo, that I am about to sing ; its sentiments will suit your feelings."

SONG.

How blest to be that lady's page,
 And live at her command ;
 To give or leave her soft message,
 Or glove her lily hand.

How sweet to watch her meaning eye,
 And ere she breathes a prayer,
 Guess, and perform it instantly,
 Then read her kind thanks there.

How blest to catch her raven hair,
 That lucky chance unties :
 The beauteous mischief to repair,
 And touch the silken prize.

What joy to place within her arms
 The lute she loves so well ;
 For, o'er it as she bends her charms,
 It seems my love to tell.

For, as her fingers press the strings,
 It yields a softer tone,
 And from her touch divine there springs
 Sounds all to earth unknown.

But of these visions heav'nly bright,
Which pass in fair array,
I'll be content to dream by night,
And sigh for all the day.

Let me but be that lady's page,
I ask not fare or fee:
To do her bidding I'll engage,
Whate'er that bidding be.

I'll place my pride in serving her,
My fame beneath her feet:
I'll live and die deserving her,
And think such death is sweet.

The tender-hearted Bruno Grillo vainly endeavoured to hide some starting tears, but conquering in a degree his feelings, he said, "It is very cruel in you, Messer Zanobi, to laugh at my poor deformed figure (unmeet, indeed, to aspire to lady's love), or by putting love lays in my mouth to render me ridiculous. I forgive you, however, in consideration of the delight your song afforded me."

The song was sung, the Abozzo completed,

and her commendation gained, in whose honour these talents were exerted ; then came the guide opportunely to conduct them another way, which they again pursued.

They now passed the Balze di Volterra, consisting of immense pits, interspersed by conical hills, whose sharp outlines were broken into innumerable fantastic forms, as if the elements of fire and water had moulded them in their wrath ; while the ground on which the travellers stood was rapidly crumbling away under their horses' feet ; for the whole face of the country was composed of a soft sand stone, which is for ever assuming new shapes. As they passed along they felt as though on the verge of destruction, and this possibility of danger, without its actual existence, lent an additional interest to the scene.

The whole tract of road presented the appearance of a vast museum of minerals, marbles, and fossils ; and Ildegarda at every step la-

mented that her ignorance of their qualities and properties deprived her of a gratifying source of entertainment. “ I will come back here,” she said, “ when I have improved my mind, and learned to appreciate the value of all the wonders I now gaze upon in ignorant admiration ;” but such resolutions, it is to be lamented, are seldom fulfilled. In youth they are perpetually formed and broken, and formed afresh, but at length the mould in which they are cast, becomes itself injured and defaced. The knowledge we acquire, that what is not done at the time is seldom or ever executed afterwards, makes us slow to believe in the return of those pleasures which we are obliged at the present moment to pass by untasted.

Ildegarda’s experience had not yet arrived at this melancholy certainty, and Maestrillo and Bruno Grillo were laden with all the brilliant coloured earths and ores which caught her eye as she passed along. “ These,” she said, “ will be mementoes, which may keep alive my wish of

returning hither." But are there any mementoes gifted with power to secure the continuance of any sentiment?—Alas! too often we look at them again only to learn the worthless mutability of the human heart and all its wishes.

The party now reached the small village of Pomerancia, and beheld at a distance, on the opposite side of the valley, the ruins of a fortress, to which Sylla is said to have retired for refuge in the times of the civil wars, which is still called *Fortezza di Sylla*, and which still frowns majestically over the landscape. The path that Ildegarda and her suite entered upon, had been described by the guide to be very good; but it proved rather a ledge of rocks made practicable by the tracks left from winter-torrents, than any road formed by the industry of man. The mountains around nevertheless assumed a more decorated aspect, and were partially tufted with dwarf ilex; while the mailed holly was armed with prickles, and was mixed with brush

wood, myrtle, lavender, and various aromatic and odoriferous plants. But the fortress was the leading feature of the scene; it seemed to follow the traveller, as it were, in every winding of his way, presenting itself in various points of view, with an imposing mien of greatness even in decay. "The idea," said Fredolfo, "that this desert was once populous with life, and that all the warring passions of men were once at work in this spot, where all is now the lonely domain of nature and her elements, conveys a feeling of inexpressible awe, but one which, while it humiliates, instructs the human mind; for it admonishes not to expect any permanent habitation, any enduring city in this earthly Canaan, but bids us ever raise our thoughts towards that better country, where shall be heavenly and eternal rest. Ildegarda—Lady, is not this a great lesson?" She understood the appeal, but her mind was tuned to another key; and she replied, "Though all

is perishable and imperfect in this our world, it does not follow that each generation is to pass away without using the means delegated to man, to ameliorate and ennoble his condition whilst on earth. If reflecting only upon the precariousness of our sojourn here, we were content to slumber on in the ignorance in which we were born, where would be the intellectual pre-eminence of man above the animal creation, and where the noble struggles for liberty and independence, which, if they fail during one generation, will sow seeds that may ripen to a glorious harvest in the next? It is well to be humble towards Heaven; but . . . if I enter into a discussion of all that your question might give birth to, I should cease to enjoy the present moment, which I wish to taste in uninterrupted delight. I shall not, however, forget the subject:" and she glanced the vivid lightning of her dark eye full upon Fredolfo. He sighed over the ruin he foresaw, and relapsed into silence. Again a

change came over the face of the country : first there was a total absence of trees and shrubs, then a lack of every kind of herbage ; and, in its place, incrustations of what appeared enamel work, of various hues, which covered large portions of ground, and mingled with the glittering ores by which it was interspersed. Rents and fissures, that crossed each other in various directions, from time to time, emitted dense vapours that almost impeded sight and respiration. On every side of the travellers' path, at irregular distances, were seen boiling cauldrons formed by the hand of nature, filled with ferruginous matter in a liquid state ; around these played various coloured flames, flickering over the aggregated masses of baked earth, which at intervals heaved with volcanic convulsion.

It appeared no longer astonishing to Ildegarda, that the uneducated peasantry should have ascribed these wonders to demoniacal agency, and her boasted philosophy was shaken by a

sensation of awe she did not choose to confess, even to herself.

Suddenly her horse became totally unmanageable, and obstinately refused to move a step in advance, notwithstanding all the caresses and threats by which he was alternately soothed and urged to proceed: his nostrils were distended, his mane stood erect, and he trembled in every limb. "It is useless," cried the guide; "you need not urge the animal further; no one but a foot passenger can pass through these enchanted and accursed regions." "But where does the Contadina Marinella reside?" cried Ildegarda: "She is a human being like ourselves, and wherever she resides there must be some way of reaching her abode." "Marinella did reside at the foot of yon opposite mountain, on which the fortress stands," said the guide, "but it is a year and more since I was at her den; and she came herself to Volterra, or its neighbourhood, to seek her own

food, which she conveys back on her mule, so that she has no occasion to see or converse with anybody; and, to speak the truth, no one is very anxious to see or converse with her, far less to question her; therefore, little else is known concerning Marinella, than what I have just related." "But you know the way to her den, as you call it," reiterated Ildegarda; "and is it not possible for me to follow you thither?" "I *did* know my way, Illustrissima; but I would not answer for knowing it now, because the earth opens its mouth in one place, and shuts it in another, every two or three days. There, lady, look! look!" and at the moment a slight commotion was felt, as of the heaving of a ship over a heavy sea, and at no great distance from them the parched ground yawned with a crackling sound, like thorns burning, while volumes of blue vapour issued from the fissure. "O San Ranieri! have mercy upon us," cried Maestrillo, bowing

very low, and quaking from head to foot ; “ if you, Mr. Earth, are hungry, pray swallow anybody but me ; I am but a lean morsel, whose bones are not worthy of being cracked by your great potency ; there is little Bruno Grillo is dainty picking ; his hunch alone will serve you to mumble at a long time ; ” pushing him forward as he spoke. “ Peace, fool ! ” — “ I will not hold my peace, while I have a tongue to ring alarum with ; and here is danger enough to set all the alarums wagging from Volterra to Assisi ; take a fool’s wisdom for once, and you will find yourself none the poorer, lady. Mount your palfrey, and home ; you may go further, and fare worse ; it will be too late when you are just going to be swallowed in one of those earthly yawns, to remember the old trite adage, *stava bene ma*—a word to the wise, says the proverb—but methinks a word from the fool, now and then, is not amiss, although the wise man turns fool, and will not hear it. Fool, or

wise, go on who will ; I will be a wise fool, and go home. Fool, and wise—wise, and fool—which is which ? Are you me, Illustrissima, or I, you ?—first one, then the other—every fool has his brother—ay, and sister too.”

“ Maestrillo, I command thee, silence,” said Ildegarda ; then turning to the guide, “ Is there no way of reaching Marinella’s abode, but across this sulphureous region ?”

“ None, that I know of,” was the reply.

“ Well, will you go with me, and endeavour to find a path : let those, who like, remain behind ?”

“ Lady,” cried Fredolfo, interposing, “ I deeply regret that I should have been the innocent cause of bringing you here ; allow me, at least, to entreat you not to push the research further at present. If Rachaela is still with the Contadina, I promise to bring her to the Palazzo, and do not you endanger your safety, I entreat, by proceeding, under the

present circumstances, so fraught with difficulty and dismay."

"Indeed," said the guide, "this is not the time of the moon for crossing these lands."

"Ah! there you see," interrupted Maestrello, "did I not tell you, that there was danger—the moon, and an old woman—two of the most diabolical things I know. Is it not by moonlight, that all poor fools, like me, are set to serenade cruel beauties under balconies without even a drop of lemonade for our pains: and is it not by moonlight that our wits all go a wandering? Has not that vile moonlight stolen all mine long ago; trust me, lady, have nothing to do with old women and moonshine."

"Come," said Ildegarda, regardless of every thing, except her eager desire to find the object of her journey, "I am weary of all this foolery, so follow me who will—the rest remain behind. Give me thine arm, (to the guide) and lead me on." So saying, she passed with a trembling

heart, though with a firm step, into the midst of a rolling vapour, which immediately concealed her from the sight of her attendants.

Maestrillo now darted at Fredolfo, and tearing the rosary from his side, dashed into the smoke after his mistress, crying loudly on San Ranieri for aid ; and on Ildegarda, to wait for him. The faithful little Bruno Grillo had glided after his mistress, unperceived ; and last of all, with a sentiment of concern for his friend, and no little regret for himself, slowly paced on the good Fredolfo, with wary step, to avoid the chasms and gulphs of the parted earth, which often impeded his progress.

Messer Cino and Zanobi were wholly abstracted from all that had passed ; the one, secretly determined to build his everlasting fame by the composition of an epic poem on Orpheus, was busily engaged in a description of Tartarus, which he had now an unhopedor opportunity of drawing from the life ; while

the other was as deeply engaged in observing the effects of refractions of lights and colours, such as he had never witnessed before ; but when they found themselves left alone, and were informed by the grooms, that Ildegarda had been gone on some time, they could not, for shame, tarry longer behind, although they had no great wish to go further.

“ ’Tis always the case,” grumbled Cino, “ with women, be they as superior and as clever as you choose ; they are ever wrong-headed, violent, wilful. Now, why could she not be content with looking at this scene in a reasonable way ? It is, to be sure, very fine, and well worth studying ; but then to pass through it when there can be nothing gained by so doing—how very strange !”

“ Yes,” rejoined Messer Zanobi, “ and, what is worse, there can be nothing to be thought either, except that one is going to be suffocated. I will go a little way, and then I will return,

for, depend upon it, the Signora herself will be obliged to do so."

"Bless me," exclaimed Cino, "do you see that refracted ray of orange mingling with the red? Just stop a moment; I must note that down in my tablets—wonderfully fine, to be sure!"

And here followed a page or two of the first work that ever appeared on the nature and cause of colours. The poem of Orpheus too, received some brilliant additions to its ninth canto; but unfortunately that composition perished in a conflagration, and its author being no more, it is lost to the world for ever.

While these artists were thus forgetting their allegiance, in the pursuit of their respective arts, Ildegarda's light pace had carried her far beyond these sulphureous regions; and she found her foot treading on a fine smooth emerald sward, through which a most limpid rivulet was gurgling along as if never interrupted, or

tarnished by its mephitic neighbours. Beyond it arose some abrupt and finely broken rocks, hollowed into caves, over which the tamarisk hung pendent, with its feathery boughs tossing their delicate heads to the breeze; below blushed the scarlet pomegranates, mingled with shrubby myrtle. Goats were browsing amongst the latter, and a young damsel of slender form stood near the flock, spinning from a distaff made of reeds. She sang the while in a soft uncertain strain, which she occasionally interrupted, to call her flock from straying too far; and the names *Zerrinella*, *Pedronella*, as she familiarly addressed them, were re-echoed among the mountains in many a musical repetition.

On observing *Ildegarda*, who had paused for some time admiring her, she suddenly ceased singing; and, as though struck by necromancy, she stood rooted to the place. *Ildegarda* approached her—still she moved not; she took her hand, and began to speak to her.—“*Santa*

Rosolia !” cried the wondering girl. “She speaks ! she touches me ! Are you really like myself ? one of flesh like me ? and not a fair compact of coloured air, as I believed ? It is very wonderful ; why, I never saw such a person before ! And this,” she added, touching Ildegarda’s hair, with an expression of reverence and admiration ; “how very soft—how very beautiful ! I never saw any thing to compare with thee before, but the radiant bow of Heaven !”

“If you are surprised to see me, fair creature, I am not the less so at beholding you ; but answer me, if you can answer me ! Do you know aught of a young boy and girl who are said to live in or near this spot ? They were some years ago nearly lost in a snow storm !”

Ildegarda had already answered the question to herself ; and, in fact, it was Rachaela who now stood before her.

The sentiment of admiration and astonishment with which they viewed each other was quite mutual, though arising from different feelings; for if Ildegarda appeared in the eyes of Rachaela something beyond mortal, Rachaela was in her's a creature of a higher order than any she had yet beheld. Rachaela's beauty was of a species which is scarcely ever seen in Italy: her glittering crisped hair was partly confined by a fillet of blue cloth, partly scattered over her shoulders; her arms and feet were bare; and, though exposed to the fervour of the sun, had as yet escaped, with no other injury to their beauty, save a few freckles, that by contrast heightened their whiteness. There was a peculiarity, however, in the carriage of her head; which, though graceful, was soon discovered to be not quite natural; it leant a little to one side, so that when she gazed intently, which she was apt to do, on the countenance of those she addressed, her clear

blue eyes were upturned with an expression of soft inquiry, that enhanced the charms of her animated countenance. It is strange how a slight defect becomes often a grace in Nature's beautiful handy-works. It was in consequence of the paralyzing cold which Rachaela had endured, when in the snow-storm she had wrapped her garments round her perishing brother, that the muscles of her throat had been affected, and never afterwards entirely recovered their functions.

During Ildegarda's interview with Rachaela, question followed question ; the answers she received confirmed her in her intention of becoming the friend and protectress of this charming damsel ; and at length, impatient to express her wishes, she said, " Will you come with me, live with me, and do me loving service ? I promise it shall be repaid back in kind."

" Oh ! fortunate creature that I am !" an-

swered Rachaela, “do I hear aright? What happiness! How shall I ever repay such kindness! Will I live with you? Will I go with you? Oh yes! with delight. Yet stay, Illustrissima! I am not my own mistress—I have a mother!” and here her voice faltered, and she wept.

“Do you love her, then, so well? She shall come also.”

“She, lady? Oh you know her not! She would not dwell with any one, or bear that any one should dwell with her! I am the only creature who is of use to her; for my brother is here, and there, and every where; but I am always with her: and if I leave her, what will become of her! But, Illustrissima, if I dare to ask you so great a favour, come to our cave; it is in one of the neighbouring rocks! Mari-nella is there at this moment; who knows what she may say! perhaps she will allow me to go

with you ; . . . perhaps for she is fond of gold."

They now proceeded towards the cave, which appeared to be near, but was, in fact, a considerable way off; and ere they reached it, Ildegarda's attendants joined her.

Maestrillo was the first of the throng.—
"Thanks to St. Ranieri !" he cried, "here we are, all alive, Illustrissima ! but in no odour of sanctity, (smelling his clothes, which were powerfully impregnated with the sulphureous vapour) that is certain ! So prithee, *Frate* Fredolfo, come forward and shrive us from the sin of having passed through such a wicked place ! Ah ! if I had not been a fool I should never have come to this pass, not so long as I was in the land of the living, at least ; however, I only followed my betters ; and it would have been better for them if they had followed the fool Maestrillo ! He would have shown them that the retrograde path is the best in sure roads ;

but here is thy rosary, take it, *Frate* ! I thought you were too good to require its aid in danger ; now again it is quite at your service."

"We must pardon you, in consideration of your profession," answered Fredolfo, somewhat angrily ; "but beware another time how thou dealest with sacred things !"

"Just what I was going to have said to you," rejoined Maestrillo, "good *Frate*, on your having brought me here."

Fredolfo frowned : and he had a frown that could command even a fool's silence !

The attention of every one was now attracted by a figure that burst upon their view, and made them all pause. In turning the abrupt corner of a rock, it appeared descending from a precipitous path above them, and approached with the swiftness and silence of those vapoury forms that are driven by storms and winds along the face of the mountains. No decrepitude betokened a weight of years ; slender and

low of stature this woman seemed to skim the earth ; nor was it till she turned her countenance full upon Ildegarda, that it was seen to be aged ; and so wild and strange was her terrific mien, that it chilled the beholder to gaze upon. Colourless and passionless were her regular features ; her large eyes seemed fixed in glassy stillness, and her long straight hair of hueless tint hung on either side of her person, and descended like the driven hoar-frost to her knees. Before Ildegarda recovered her surprise, Marinella said in a sharp but low tone of voice, which resembled in its sound the whistling of the wintry blast, “ I know why thou art come here ; and I saw thee doubtful whether or not to tempt my faithful guardians, but thy courage has stood thee in good stead, and brave spirits give power to the brave. Thou hast passed the cloud and the fire and the smoke ; and three things of similar power thou shalt overpass—but of the fourth beware : it is the view-

less sword, for that shall pass through thee ; but it is thy destiny, and walk thou on ! What wouldst thou more ?” Ildegarda was awed, but shaking off the weakness which, in spite of herself had assailed her, she replied, “ I came not to inquire of you concerning my destiny ; that is in the hands of an Almighty Providence, and it is a matter which becomes not us to speculate upon. I came to speak of the children in your care ; and now that I have seen and conversed with your Rachaela, I wish to obtain a great boon of you. Will you consent to my taking her as my own for ever ; not to live with me as an attendant, for she shall be to me as a younger sister—will you ? I pray you do !” Marinella laughed long and fearfully, without any correspondent emotion being expressed in her countenance, and having thus indulged her humour, replied, “ Thou mayest carry Rachaela away with thee for the price of two hundred scudi, and one hundred more—but be

swift; Marinella waits for no one, although many a one hath waited, and shall wait for her. Quick, lay down the gold, and away with thee; but approach not my abode nearer than thou hast already done; the wild beast's lair is best avoided by the lamb—hence then, begone!—What wouldest thou more? wouldest thou obtain thy wish, without paying its price? That cannot be—all things have their cost.” “Not so,” joined Ildegarda, recovering her presence of mind, in spite of the astonishment and disgust she felt at this address—“not so, I would pay a great price to obtain your Rachaella; but I will not be the dupe of your avarice.” “Then thou wilt not have the damsel—come, child, back to your cave;” and she wrapped her long lean arms around her. Ildegarda shuddered as she beheld the blooming Rachaella pressed in such a terrible embrace, and covered with the mist-like hair of this unnatural creature. “Oh! not so,—not so!” she cried, overcome at the sight; “here take the gold, the worthless gold.

Bruno Grillo, my purse—quick.” And snatching it from him, she counted the money, adding heedlessly to the covenanted heap—“there,” muttered the unnatural Marinella, “there it is; I knew how it would end; ’tis good merchandise that pleaseth the merchant—

Thou likest the girl, I like the gold;
’Tis fair that ’s bought, ’tis fair that ’s sold:
But there is more in store for thee
Than meets a common destiny;
Through fire, clouds, smoke, thou shalt pass free,
But a viewless sword shall pass through thee.”

So saying, she again laughed long and loud, and hastily gathering the money in the folds of her garment, this spectral being passed away with the price of her offspring in that bosom where once it had lain an infant, the tender object of her care. Could this be so? is nature ever so debased?

“St. Ranieri be praised!” cried Maestrillo, his teeth chattering together as he spoke, “she is gone; but no good can come of having

seen her, that is certain; and I am sure you will find that beautiful girl there, whom you have just bought with your gold, *Illustrissima*, is a sorry bargain: who knows what she may hide under that fair skin of her's; we shall all feel the weight of her demoniacal mother's power some day or other."

"Fool, be silent," cried *Ildegarda*, on seeing that *Rachaella* looked distressed.

"Now befool me, lady, as much as you will; but I pray you do not take away my prerogative: why my tongue is the very crown of my glory, the pick-axe that hewed my way to fortune, the finger-post that showed the road to my lady's favour, the tinkling bell that wakens other men's fancies, the very essence of foolery, the sceptre of my state, and the bond of my relationship with all the great upon earth."

"Well, well, good *Maestrillo*, keep thy prate only for fitting times and seasons, and I will confirm thee in its right."

The fool was wise enough to know the commands which might or might not be disobeyed ; so turning himself round three times, and settling his head with his two hands on his shoulders, he walked in stately silence after Ildegarda. The latter, at Rachaela's earnest solicitation, forbore to indulge her curiosity by following Marinella, and yielded to the damsel's entreaties to hasten away, lest she should change her determination, and recall her to her care.

“ And now, beauteous lady, one only kindness more have I to crave ; it is the company of my favourite. He who was the means of saving my life—see, he is close to me ; never has he left me for a moment.” And here Rachaela caressed a most picturesque dog of enormous growth, whose beautiful white hair and jet black eyes might alone have commanded admiration ; but when the story attached to him, lent its interest in addition to his personal attractions, it would have been as unkind as it was unlike

Ildegarda, to have refused the request. Ildegarda now retraced her steps to cross the same sulphureous regions, over which she had so lately passed ; but with what different feelings ! for now she led a newly acquired treasure along with her. The very nature of the place seemed changed, and to have assumed a gentler aspect. The earth withheld its fires—the strange beauty of the coloured substances which enamelled the ground could now be looked upon in safety, and the path, lately so terrific, was traversed in perfect security.

The whole adventure had excited Ildegarda beyond her most imaginative anticipations, and in that excitement she found the qualification which she had hitherto sought for in vain.—There was mystery, and beauty, and surprise, and something almost supernatural in the scenes and beings she had beheld.—She wearied not of asking questions of Rachaella, the freshness of whose mind was an unruffled Eden,

profuse of flower and fragrance. The Palazzo Gherardesca received its mistress once more safely within its portals, and Rachaela was declared the friend and favourite, who was henceforth destined to be to Ildegarda a second self.

CHAPTER IV.

RACHAELLA RELATES WHAT SHE KNOWS OF HER OWN
HISTORY.

Romantic dreams, perchance, yet beautiful !
When truth and reason these bright visions dull,
Say, will they aught of sterling worth impart,
To rouse the languor of the dreary heart ?
O time ! what dreadful secrets lie concealed
Within thy womb, one day to be revealed !
And, as our web is wove out year by year,
See what deep stains, what grained spots appear !
Remorse may furrow that fair open brow,
And grief may break the heart exulting now.

“Imagination,” that beautiful Poem by L. P.

THE dawn of a first friendship possesses
an enchantment in common with that of love,
namely, that it discovers to us interests and

feelings of which we were unconscious, till this sentiment reveals them. Like those beautiful effects which the rising sun produces on the natural world, the glow of affection invests with an imaginary charm objects too frequently of little intrinsic value. Hence to the young and inexperienced, whose hearts are new to this delicious feeling, its indulgence is full of danger. And ah! what heart can guard itself from the treachery of a friend. But if there be a chance of escaping this dreadful possibility, it is to pause, whatever it may cost us, ere the sweet impulse be yielded to, ere the attraction gains the mastery over reason and principle, and to ask of God, and of that never-erring monitor within our own breasts, if the attachment we would form be such as may in innocence endure here, and such as we can hope may be permitted to exist hereafter.

Ildegarda learned from Rachaela that ever

since she could remember, she had seen no place save the cavern and its immediate vicinage, with the exception of that one day, when, eight years ago, she had been sent, as before related, to the vine-dresser. Her sole employments were tending the flocks and providing the food and raiment necessary to existence.

As to her brother, he had left them about a year after that sole event which had ever marked an epoch in her life, and she had wept many a day and night for him, but Marinella had replied to her tears and questions only by telling her, that men governed the world, and had a destiny of nobler kind to fulfil than that of woman: all the latter had to do on earth was to learn to obey and be silent, to feed on tears till their source was dry, and when that time arrived, to live as they could upon the fruits of their experience, and laugh at those who had still tears to shed.

“ I led a joyless life, lady,” continued Ra-

chaella, “and yet sometimes I was very happy too.”

“Poor child, how could you be happy?”

“Oh, lady! not happy as I am now; yet when I sang to the stars, and talked to the clouds, and made garlands, and dressed my goats with them, I felt all these things to be as if they were living friends who loved me: I gave them names, and looked for them, and joyed in their coming, and sorrowed in their going, as now I look for your presence, or feel in your absence: and then I always hoped Edoardo would come back to his poor Rachaela, who had so dearly loved and cherished him.”

“Did Marinella never talk to you; never caress you?”

“Sometimes, but very seldom; and when she did, she said such things that made me feel as though I were turning into stone:—thus would she speak. ‘Miserable wretch! you had better

never have been born :’ then leading me to the rivulet, she would bid me look into it, saying, ‘ Seest thou those flowery cheeks, those star-like eyes, that crisped hair of thine, damsel ?—wherefore are they given to make thee wretched ?’ At such times she would press me for a moment in her arms, but I shrunk from the pressure ; I hope I was not wicked ; I could not love her. Sometimes I used to ask her if she would never take me to Edoardo ; I told her I should like to go where he was, wherever that might be ; I should like to see other creatures like ourselves ; and then I felt I uttered what was not true—I wished not to see more beings like poor Marinella. At such questions, at such declarations, she would laugh wildly ‘ Child of sorrow,’ she would say, ‘ have you too learnt to lie ? then indeed must the evil one pervade all nature. No, you cannot wish to see such as I am—but neither do I believe that another like myself exists—nor are there many

like thyself; nor is it such thou wishest to see; but the star of thy destiny leads thee on, and it is well; why should I alone be the sufferer?’

“ It was with words such as these that Marinella often disturbed my quiet; I could not understand their meaning; but after conversing with her, I felt as though the flowers were withered, the stars were rayless, and the brook seemed to murmur hoarsely. I had no friend, and now that Edoardo was away, no earthly comforter. My brother had in his long rambles seen the peasants praying at holy shrines, and he used to tell me of the Great Power that overrules all things, and who hears us when we cry unto him. He told me too of the images and relics to which those happy people addressed themselves in all their wants and wishes; but I was not permitted to have these links which bind the earth to heaven; I was cut off from such soothing communion; and once, when Edoardo brought me a rosary, Marinella tore

it from me, and said, ‘it was a chain that enslaved thousands to their undoing.’ Oh! lady, what would I not have given to have possessed the shrine I remembered so well, in which we took refuge the night we were nearly lost in the storm—to have had it placed on my favourite hill, to have dressed it every day, and to have prayed to it. You, Illustrissima, can have no idea of the loneliness of my heart, with nothing on earth, nothing in heaven to commune with. I tried, however, within myself to pray; for I never forgot the peace that was poured down upon me in the day and night of our great distress, when I raised my thoughts to God.”

It was to such innocent confidences as these that Ildegarda lent a willing ear, and the darkness of her own spirit seemed illumined under the sunny influence of her young friend’s.

Fredolfo was delighted to have procured such a companion for her, and spared no pains

to cherish the piety with which Rachaela was gifted, and to fix it on a more firm basis than that of the mere impulses of natural feeling, by which it had hitherto been excited. It was not the love of power which impelled this ecclesiastic to obtain an influence over the proud unbending Ildegarda. He had a parental fondness for her ; he loved her for her own sake, and for that of her father ; and as he had long foreseen with alarm the blow which an insulted Hierarchy threatened to strike her, he made it the business of his life to endeavour to avert it, and by working some effectual change in Ildegarda's conduct, at least, save herself from the wrath to which she had so rashly exposed herself. In Rachaela he found a docile and apt scholar, and as he hoped a useful, because an unexpected, assistant in his efforts with her friend. The information he carried to her, respecting the ceremonial rites of his church, afforded much delightful occupation to her

timid yet fervent mind, which now, for the first time, received religious instruction. But Rachaela was led on by others, less sincere and good, through all the intricacies of the Roman Catholic faith, till her tender enthusiastic spirit soared in a state of mystic aberration. She was, however, looked up to, by the whole body of the priesthood, as one of the Church's brightest female ornaments, and above all, as to a person through whose means Ildegarda and her riches would ultimately be brought within their power. This base design would have been speedily frustrated, had the disinterested Fredolfo remained to watch over her; but unfortunately he was called away to a distant duty, and the man to whom he delegated his authority was of a very different character.

Under the guidance and instruction of Nino Pucci, Rachaela imbibed superstitious notions, from which all the enlightened arguments of her friend could not in after-times free her mind;

and while that friend was forming plans for the liberal improvement of those around her, endeavouring to unchain their minds from prejudice, distributing rewards to such as met her wishes, and labouring with unwearied zeal to convert those who did not, Rachaela was imbibing the very spirit of intolerance and bigotry under the mask of devotion.

But this period was nevertheless a green spot in the sandy Araby of Ildegarda's path. It is pleasant to linger here, and view her acting with all the generous impulse of her nature, and feeling that spirit of native greatness within her, which required only the restraining hand of prudence to render her the most deserving, as she was already the most noble of her sex. How often did Ildegarda afterwards look back upon this moment of her existence, and recall the vision as one replete with the purest happiness.

While her mind was thus intent on a high,

though improvable, object of attainment, her heart was engaged in the mild intercourse of friendship, and her days flowed on in an uninterrupted course of self-satisfaction and improvement. Alternation of rest and activity, of society and solitude, is perhaps the most favourable union of circumstances to strengthen the mental constitution ; but if one or other of these is not attainable, there surely can be no hesitation in saying, that a life passed among scenes of nature and in contemplative repose, is far more likely to form a truly great character, than a busy life devoted to the world, where amidst all the scene of human passions, bubbling as it were in one vast cauldron, a process invariably takes place, which, if it does not wholly debase, never fails to harden the heart, and to produce an involuntary selfishness, even in the most tender and ingenuous dispositions.

The world, thus adhered to, inevitably becomes our master, and is any thing but an easy

master, even to those, who, possessing all its advantages, are best entitled to its smiles. There is a servility in flattering its votaries, in overlooking vice, and disregarding virtue ; in leveling all the higher attributes of man's nature to mere conventional forms of custom or opinion, which is most awfully prejudicial to the real interests of the soul. The greater number of persons who compose the busy mob of fashionable life, have reached its dizzy sphere by the mere whip and spur of their own exertions : it is pitiable to think how much invaluable time is wasted by them in a race in which they are distanced by the younger, and the fairer, the more witty, and the more prosperous. It is truly melancholy for a person indifferent to this kind of distinction, or one to whom it pertains by right of birth and circumstance, and who is consequently not the slave of such exertions, to see even the naturally good and sensible, drawn into the vortex, and squandering the essence

of their existence, in the same heartless pursuits with the frivolous and depraved part of mankind.

The present period of Ildegarda's life appeared to her to be the seed-time of an abundant and joyful harvest. Under her judicious management, the condition of the peasantry, in the immediate district around her, was ameliorated to a degree that caused the envy and ill-will of the rest of the country. Nor was this class alone the object of her care. The arts flourished beneath her palace roof, and all who had rare manuscripts to dispose of, or other matters conducive to intellectual improvement or the revival of literature, flocked to the Gherardesca, ever sure to find in her a ready purchaser for their treasures.

A year passed away. The change which, during this lapse of time, had rapidly taken place in Rachaela's mind, remained unnoticed by her friend, whose thoughts were too deeply

engaged in her own high pursuits to be alive to the alteration ; and she was the more easily blinded, because the species of intercourse which existed between them, flowed on in an uninterrupted course, wholly apart from the enlarged views which Ildegarda took of life. The difference of their age and situation precluded discussions which would have forced the truth upon her ; and thus the sweetness of their intercourse was yet pure and unalloyed.

Matters were in this condition at the Fortezza Gherardesca, when Ildegarda caused proclamation to be made through the adjacent country, that a trial of skill in the game of *pallone* would take place within the precincts of her palace, to which she invited all candidates for fame in that well-known amusement.

It was an ancient game of Italy, and Ildegarda loved to foster every national remembrance which could keep alive the spirit of her country. But that there might be food for

various fancies, she made it known, that she should at the same time hold a court of love and gallantry, to which all minstrels were summoned to sing the beauty of their ladies, and the valour of their knights. In a mingled spirit of defiance and good-will, Ildegarda sent invitations to all those persons who had withdrawn from her circle, that she might prove the force of good cheer and brilliant society over prejudice and bigotry. It was a speculation not less amusing in those days than in the present, for men's passions are much the same in all ages, though variously developed or disguised, according to the influence and fashion of the times. In the days of Ildegarda, there were the same jealousies, the same stirring and heart-burnings, and the same wish to be diverted, if it could be contrived with safety to worldly interests, as exists now. There were whisperings to know if others of their own class and consideration, who had deserted before,

meant on the present occasion to rally around the former object of their attention and their jealousy, for she had been alternately such to all. Yes, discussions such as these took place then, as they do now, and the result was nearly the same ; for it was decided, that however necessary it might be to decline an intimacy with so suspicious and dangerous a character, there could be no reflection cast upon them for being present at a large and public assembly, such as they were now bidden to. Names of consequence were repeated with an air of encouraging authority from mouth to mouth, as among the intended visitors, and these served as precedents for the attendance of others, whose timidity might have prevented their accepting the invitation. Certain reservations, however, considered prudential to their interests, were made by the more cautious, such as, “ They would go, but should retire most certainly at an early hour ; they would not remain to partake the

banquet ; they would walk round to see the show, and no more :” and thus by these and similar salvos to their consciences, they one and all agreed to see what was to be seen, and to enjoy the festivities of the day ; all, save one—and one whose presence Ildegarda would rather have obtained than that of the whole multitude : this person was the Signora Lanfreducci, the mother of Ranieri Lanfreducci, a man looked up to by all as the worthy son of so distinguished a mother. It had long been an ardent wish of Ildegarda’s to know and be known by the Lanfreducci. She was a woman of retired habits, who hid herself from the gaze of the public eye, and whose virtues were of that grave and severe cast which commanded the respect she did not deign to solicit. Still she was respected ; and however lavishly the incense of flattery may be wafted round the shrine of beauty and of fascination, there is wanting a more secure and permanent right to applause

than such perishable material can ensure. No one was more sensible of this than Ildegarda; and few things would have pleased her more than to have obtained the friendship of the Lanfreducci. On the present occasion, she had trusted to have seen this lady; for Ranieri was celebrated as being one of the most skilful players at the game of Pallone. He was said to be a poet also.

On these circumstances, Ildegarda founded the hope, that maternal love and a ~~very~~ ^{very} inseparable, as she thought, from a parent's fondness, would not resist the triumph of witnessing her child's success in the proposed contest. Ildegarda was, however, disappointed: Ermenegilda declined her invitation in terms of coldness, though of courtesy.

"Her son," she said, "would feel honoured to attend the Signora Gherardesca; but, for herself, she never went to shows or pageants."

"Oh! if I could but see," thought Ildegarda,

with a latent hope, that if she were seen herself by her, her presence would effect what all her previous endeavours had failed to do. “ If I could but know, and be known to that one superior being, the fame of whose exalted virtues has reached me through all the means she takes to conceal them. But, perhaps ——” (and the frailty of human nature for a moment found admission to Ildegarda’s thoughts,) “ this seclusion—this measured propriety—this affectation of humility, may be but the effect of a commonplace insipid character. But why should I think more of this? Doubtless, Ranieri is of the same cast: Well! ’tis no matter: time will develop what I now doubt upon.” Yet, while she spoke, she felt the sting she wished to extract, and it rankled the deeper, because sharpened by offended self-love.

CHAPTER V.

THE GIUOCO DI PALLONE.

ILDEGARDA IS IN DANGER.

Le meilleur remède contre toutes les contrariétés qui m'attendent, c'est de fortifier en moi la résolution de faire de grandes choses ; car je me connais assez pour être sûr que l'espoir ou la confiance d'être utile au bien général, a, par dessus toutes choses la vertu de me rendre intrépide et tranquille.

Lettre de Jean de Muller.

THE busy noise of preparation for the coming festival rang through the castle walls, and every inhabitant of its courts and offices was occupied in fulfilling the wishes of its noble mistress, to render the scene magnificent and enchanting.

Rumour meanwhile, without doors, did not remain idle ; and among many others, one cause assigned for the celebration of this festivity, was a passion of Ildegarda's for some unknown object ; while other persons, more bold in their conjectures, pronounced at once a marriage to be the end in view. Old prejudices were said to be laid aside. The Conte Pafetta di Montescudajo, her once discarded lover, (but of whose guilt no proofs existed,) was now, they said, recalled, to be reinstated in all his pristine favour. He had, indeed, been invited to the festival in common with the rest, and on this simple act of courtesy was raised these idle and unfounded conjectures. To give increased importance to this conclusion, the chief magistrates of the Republic (it was added) had at one time forbidden the proceedings of the proposed assembly, as of dangerous precedent, in drawing so large a concourse of people together, who might under similar pretences convene, if not in the present

instance, at some future time, for secret purposes against the State. But since Pafetta, who was nearly related to one of their body, gave his assurance that the intended festivities were quite innocent, and devoid of all sinister intentions whatever, every doubt had ceased on the propriety of the business, and it was confidently asserted, he had his reasons for countenancing Ildegarda, and sanctioning her festival.

At length, the long expected day arrived ; and the sun shone brightly forth, as though joyful to honour Ildegarda's holiday. The oblong square, appointed for the games, was strewn with a fine red sand, so that the arena glittered like gold. Around its limits rose a strong lattice-work of brass, dividing the galleries, from whence the spectators, safe from the rebounding balls, might witness the skilful combatants. The great court of the castle opened wide its portals, hung with festoons of flowers, to receive the expected throng ; its area

was carpetted with tapestry, and the fountain in the midst sent forth on that day a stream of perfumed waters into its sculptured basin. Bands of musicians were placed in concealments under the vaulted arcades, adding by their art to the charm of the surrounding scene. From the court, the guests passed on through a terraced garden, whose flowers, and fountains, and statues, mingled their various beauties. They then continued their way under trellises of most exquisite workmanship, and ascended by marble steps to a saloon; at the entrance of which the attendants of Ildegarda stood ready to conduct them to her presence. She had taken her station at the end of the saloon, which was decorated with no ornament save the banners and trophies won by her father, and the large escutcheons of arms, with the manifold quarterings and insignias of foreign honours, which had been conferred on him by various governments and

princes of his day, in commemoration of, and gratitude for, his splendid services.

Ildegarda wore the dress of an unmarried citizen of Pisa; her raven hair was plaited with silken cords of alternate red and blue and silver, which was wound round the back part of the head, and fixed with bodkins of silver and gold. Her garment was long and ample, flowing in full and graceful folds; over it hung a shorter tunic, which reached only to the knees, of a different colour, and lighter texture than the one beneath. A zone of coral and lapis lazuli bound her waist, and a rich scarf of divers colours, wrought with 'gold, was thrown around her neck, and, falling over her shoulders, descended to the ground. Behind her stood Rachaela, with this difference only in their attire, that her hair hung down in luxuriant ringlets from beneath a crown of flowers, which circled her brow: at a little distance in the background, were Maestrillo, Bruno Grillo,

and the nurse Radegonda, all gorgeously apparelled, and wearing on their sleeve a badge of servitude, set with precious stones.

Thus attired and attended, Ildegarda received her guests. She felt a secret triumph, not unmixed with disdain, at beholding those who had forsaken and deserted her in the true spirit of the world's caprice, now approach with pleased looks and words of homage.

While gazing on this crowd, who offered their insipid adulation to her who contemned them in her heart, two persons of very different stamp suddenly arrested her attention. Ranieri Lanfreducci and Pafetta di Montescudajo entered the apartment together. Ildegarda had not seen the latter for many years ; his person had attained much grandeur, and a more haughty expression sat on his brow ; but it was not his comeliness or noble port that arrested the freedom of her respiration, and rivetted her to the spot on which she stood ; it

was a vision of the past: it was a confused bewildering remembrance of vows and tenderness to which she once had listened, and which now mingled with a chilling recollection of the events that had dissolved them for ever, and banished him from her presence.

Can a woman behold a once loved object, and be wholly unmoved? Love may be extinct in her bosom, but, as one escaped from shipwreck looks on the ocean which yawned to engulph its prey, so does she gaze on the being who once held over her a power of life or death; but who can never be any thing again to her, either of delight or of danger.

With this undisguised expression of emotion on her countenance, Ildegarda listened in silence to the address of Pafetta; and while, with a searching glance, he uttered his well-turned compliment in a measured speech, his cool self-possession gave him full opportunity to examine the effect which he produced on

her. Ildegarda trembled whilst undergoing this scrutiny, and twice she assayed to speak but could not ! Pafetta saw her agitation and smiled ; but Pafetta's smile was no generous expression of delight ; there was fascination in it, but it was the fascination of terror ; “ the lightning of a collied night ! ”

As he ceased speaking, he led forward another person, who, although admired by the spectators, had hitherto been unnoticed by Ildegarda, Ranieri Lanfreducci, who was now presented to her. He stood in silence before her, abstracted and confused, as if overcome by some bewildering emotion, and unable to command the usual phrases spoken on such occasions. When Pafetta, however, uttered his name, the Gherardesca started, and a sense of what was passing at the present moment around her, seemed to return at the sound.

“ Lanfreducci,” she said, while the colour which had left her cheek returned with deeper

dye, "I grieve that I see not the Contessa your mother here; allow me to add, that not even the presence of her son dispels the gloom her absence occasions, although I am happy to bid him welcome."

In speaking thus, Ildegarda had recovered her natural dignity; she expressed freely what she felt, and she never looked so beautiful as when her genuine feelings found an unconstrained utterance. All concealment, either in thought or word, sat peculiarly ill upon her, for it was not her nature ever to be unnatural. How captivating she appeared at this moment to Lanfreducci, others might read in his eyes; but he was himself wholly unable to express; and having bowed low, he passed her in a hurried manner, as though happy to escape her fascinating presence. Pafetta too retired, but only to return and hover still near her footsteps, as if drawn by some spell he could not avoid; and wherever she moved he followed.

Meanwhile the numerous guests that thronged the palace and its gardens were gratifying their curiosity in beholding all the wonders these afforded. The noble apartments were displayed, rich in the works of art, while at intervals, from their spacious casements, the most magnificent views of the adjacent country presented pictures of Nature, surpassing all the boast of the pencil.

Around the walls were placed cabinets and cases, in which the riches of the East were collected; while on termini of precious marbles, reposed the sculptured works of ancient Greece. Ildegarda had mingled these various objects together, in a manner at once striking and unusual. Her own pursuits and taste might be read in their arrangement and their choice; her spirit pervaded the whole, and even those who were incapable of entering into all the refinements of her taste, still acknowledged the power of a charm, which, for the time, raised

them above themselves, and endowed them with a perception of an enjoyment they had never before experienced.

While the higher orders of the assembled multitude were thus examining the interior of the palace, the crowd of villagers and retainers were not less gratified by the care which had been taken of their pastimes and amusements. The various games of the country were all prepared for them, and the only forbidden diversions were those which could inflict pain on any living thing. Tables were laden with exquisite viands, fruits and wines were placed on the terraces, and sweetmeats in the shape of saints, and gods, and goddesses, were piled together in glittering pyramids, to attract the eye and tempt the appetite.

The festivities of the day commenced with the *Giucoco di Pallone*, that the players might have the benefit of the morning's freshness. The Pallone is a game of antique origin, and the

beautiful attitudes into which those engaged in it necessarily throw themselves, combined with the changing chances of the contest, give perpetual variety to this exhibition.

Half way up the right arm of the combatant is placed a leathern cistus, which serves both as a guard, and, at the same time, to give an impetus to the ball; while the arm itself gracefully extended, the head thrown back, and the muscles of the figure finely displayed, recall to the recollection the finest works of Grecian sculpture. Doubtless it was in exhibitions of this nature, so prevalent in ancient Greece, that her artists found those opportunities of studying the human form, which enabled them to attain a perfection, to which the genius of succeeding ages has aspired in vain.

The ladies, with such of the guests as took no active part in the contest, were stationed within a gallery, defended by a net of brass-work, as has been already mentioned. Around this gal-

lery were suspended, to the eyes of the eager combatants, coronets of ilex, destined to grace the victor's brows. Full opportunity of observing the Conti di Montescudajo was afforded to Ildegarda during the game; and it was impossible to view, without admiration, the symmetry of his form, and the perfect grace with which he directed its movements. A general murmur of applause ran repeatedly through the crowd of admiring spectators, as his exertions called into various action the fine turn of his limbs, and now displayed the force of an Athleta, and now the grace of an Apollo. But the heart of Ildegarda involuntarily shrunk back from joining the loud clamour of approbation which rent the air; for a recollection of past suspicions rushed into her mind; and when the contest ended, that he was declared the victor, and approached to receive the destined crown from the hands of Ildegarda, she hastily arose and fled from the scene. A sudden and portentous silence en-

sued, and the hilarity of the meeting was suspended, as if from some invisible and baneful influence. Twelve years had not wholly effaced the fond recollection of those virtues which had enshrined the deceased Guglielmo Gheradesca in the hearts of his countrymen; and whispers now were circulated, that his sister, struck by some powerful, though unseen motive, could not crown the man with honours who had been the supposed cause of her brother's death. There was a pause of mingled surprise and horror, which arrested the whole multitude; and although the Conte di Montescudajo, with admirable presence of mind, affected a great interest on the sudden indisposition of Ildegarda, to which he artfully attributed her disappearance, the impression left on the greater part of the assembly was, that Ildegarda had been struck by remorse, and was unable to go through the ceremony.

It was not long after that she had retired to

the privacy of her own apartment, when a sense of propriety returned.—She recalled her scattered senses,—she lamented having yielded to a momentary impulse,—she acknowledged the imprudence and unworthiness of her conduct, and with a feeling of indignation against herself, for having thus violated the rights of hospitality, she determined to plead illness as an apology, and endeavour to supply, by redoubled attention and courtesy to Montescudajo, her injudicious and hasty conduct. Ildegarda, with a disturbed and agitated air and manner, returned to her guests, and endeavoured to do away the effect of her behaviour; but she was not an adept at concealment; and though Pafetta, with apparently undisturbed tranquillity, received her excuses, and accepted the ilex crown she tendered to him, he nevertheless was thoroughly aware of her real feelings; and, in his breast, secretly vowed revenge. The rest of the guests quickly returned to their own subjects of amusement,

as soon as the cause which had interrupted these was removed, and thought little more of the matter ; for the world never cares for any event beyond the passing moment, which does not affect their own interests.

The heat of the day being intense, the higher order of visitors sought the shade of the palace-chambers ; the rest, that of the bowers and treillises, where their refreshments and their amusements had been duly attended to.

Enjoyment was again restored to all, save to Ildegarda ; a cruel vision had dispelled her mirthful feelings, and the mere crowd of common-place adulators that surrounded her, could not banish the train of thought which it had suggested. Had the Signora Lanfreducci been among them, she felt that there would have been one of her own sex pre-eminent in virtue and distinction, to have sanctioned by her presence the splendour and gaiety which, as it was,

seemed to her but a silly vain show, that she repented of having devised.

Thus the proud Ildegarda, commanding by her rank and wealth the homage of the multitude, felt that something was wanting to her self-approbation, while the most distinguished person of her own sex declined not only her intimacy, but her society.

There was a stamp of feminine dignity and feminine virtue on the character of Lanfreducci, which those who affect to undervalue never fail to repent of.

The painful reverie in which these reflections threw Ildegarda, was interrupted by Bruno Grillo announcing that the library was opened for the inspection of the curious, and that the librarian was in waiting, as well as Messer Cino, to explain the wonders over which they presided. Thither then the crowd impetuously rushed with the eagerness of children to catch

some new plaything; but how few among the number were gifted with powers to appreciate what they vacantly gazed upon? It must however be acknowledged, that the love of the arts is indigenous to the very soil of Italy; and that, with a few exceptions, it is amongst its lowest ranks that the genuine love and admiration of these is most clearly displayed. Where, in any other nation, can precious works liable to injury be publicly exposed to the populace, and yet suffer no damage? Where, in any other nation, will be overheard such feeling and pertinent remarks on the merits of such works, as are to be heard from the lips of mountain-peasants, and artisans, when gazing, it may be, for the first time on these the pride and boast of their country? Does any idea of ribaldry or grossness suggest itself to their imagination?—No, their mind is formed, as it seems, by Nature, to receive the grand and simple impressions which the highest works of art are intended alone to inspire.

Ildegarda was not aware of this beautiful distinction of her fellow-citizens and countrymen, because she knew not that these objects could be productive of less pure or high influences; but she wholly forgot that she was the mistress of the superb collection now displayed, in that more generous delight which the mere view of their beauties conferred upon herself, as well as upon those around her.

“How very enchanting it is,” observed Ranieri, turning towards her, “to observe such a vivid admiration of these sublime arts, as that which you, Signora, express.”

Ildegarda scarcely heard him, and replied, rather carrying on the train of her own thoughts than answering to his, “Yes, it is indeed a pursuit worthy of creatures gifted with reason, to save such works from neglect and decay, that they may excite others to emulate their perfection. How insignificant are all ho-

nours compared to those, which the suffrage of ages has conferred upon them."

Ildegarda paused, and casting her eyes on those of her companion, she beheld them irradiated with a splendid expression of admiration, and something of mixed feeling, purer and tenderer still, which she ascribed more to the nature of the subject conversed upon, than to her own attractions.

If there is a circumstance pre-eminently advantageous to a man's success in life, it is to have his first feelings directed, his first principles implanted, by a woman of virtuous and superior mind. There is a noble enthusiasm roused by the influence of such a guide, which an intercourse with the world may damage, but which it seldom destroys. Such had been the result of Ranieri's education, under the eye of his mother, and his deep conviction of her excellence had fixed his standard of perfection very high; yet high as that standard was

placed, he thought Ildegarda moved above it. In her, youth, beauty, genius, were united to an expression of mind so vigorous and noble, that, from that moment, he thought to love her was to aspire to every thing that could exalt his being. Instead, therefore, of making a direct reply to her observation, he exclaimed, "Why does my mother not know you?" Ildegarda, by her silence, by her glowing cheeks and troubled air, answered his question more emphatically than she could have done by words. Then, suddenly recovering herself, her countenance underwent a change of expression, and she replied in a cool disdainful manner, "The Contessa doubtless has good reasons for not accepting my proffered acquaintance."

Ranieri could make no answer—but he felt the more intensely, and determined in his own mind that an introduction between them should take place. After a pause of silence, painful enough to either party, Ildegarda and Lan-

freducci recovered from the train of thought to which the latter part of their conversation had led, and they continued to wander from one object of investigation to another till the setting sun announced the hour for the court of love to hold its judicature.

The Conte di Montescudajo, meanwhile, had followed their footsteps, accompanied by the Signora Zerlina, and overheard some part of their discourse. “What fools women make of themselves when they attempt to move out of their proper sphere,” said the former to his companion. This proud Ildegarda would be an empress, and thinks the way to arrive at the object of her ambition is by overturning all the powers that do exist. The Signora Lanfreducci, it is true, is not less haughty and overbearing, but she hides her impertinence under a mask of sanctity, which is the safer plan of the two. Nevertheless, my fair Zerlina, both these women are insufferable, and we shall be able, I hope,

to overturn them and their plots: even now they do not like one another, though curiosity prompts them to desire an interview; but my word for it they shall yet hate each other with all the bitterness of which you gentle creatures are capable. I have no patience with this Ildegarda: why should she alone employ poets and painters to commemorate her charms when my Zerlina is in existence? This shall not be so.

Zerlina's anger and envy, which had been sufficiently excited, now gave place to the hope of outshining her rival; and, with a thirst for revenge in her heart, and a smile of fiendish hypocrisy on her lips, she pressed forwards through the crowd to rejoin Ildegarda and Ranieri; saying to the former, "Oh! lady, what varied powers you possess by which to captivate us! you are not satisfied with your own personal charms, but you call in science, philosophy, and the arts, to your aid. Why,

all your sex must die with envy—all, save those who love you as I do,” she added, coaxingly placing her arm within that of Ildegarda’s; “but do you know, I have a secret to communicate, which, as being your friend, I must really tell you. Although to one as innocent and kind as you are, it is almost cruel to repeat any thing so very ill-natured—but come, as we walk to the theatre, I will recount this anecdote to you.—Do you know, my dear, that that vile Contessa Lanfreducci entertains the bitterest spite against you; and I actually yesterday saw a note in her own hand-writing, desiring the Anziani to keep a sharp look out upon you, for that you were the most mischievous and designing person in the world. Your late long retirement was only a cloak, she said, to the machinations which you had secretly been carrying on, since your father’s death, against church and state; nay, it was even reported, that you had enlisted the black art of astrology

into your service, in order to effect your purposes." Here Ildegarda looked at her with sovereign contempt. "Nay, but hear me, Signora," rejoined Zerlina, "I abhor and despise the malice and falsehood of such accusations; but I know, nevertheless, that they ought to be guarded against."

"Oh!" said Ildegarda, "it is an honour to be hated by the mean, and the idle, and the suspicious. I cannot believe the Signora Lanfreducci is such; she, whose character has redeemed that of her whole insignificant countrywomen: and, therefore, I give no credence to her having written such a farrago of lies and nonsense. Your eyes must have deceived you, my good Contessa: are you sure that you can read writing easily?"

Zerlina blushed, and bit her lips in spite; determining that, for every sting this speech contained, Ildegarda should have two inflicted upon her in return.

“ Well, well, I see how it is, the handsome son has made the peace of the proud mother ; but, believe me, you may yet rue the day when you disregarded my counsel.”

They were now arrived at the amphitheatre, in which were already assembled the minstrels and *trouveurs*, and *improvisatrici* of the day, all habited in their several costumes, all bearing the insignia of their vocation, and the devices of their several mistresses. A crescent of benches rose one above another, shaded on three sides by a dark *ilex* grove ; and on the fourth, commanded a fine extensive view, bounded in the distance by the Siena hills.

The whole concourse of persons were now assembled, and took their places in this sylvan theatre. It was a pleasant sight, and grateful to the mind of Ildegarda to observe that many of the lowest classes appeared more delighted with this part of the exhibition than with any of the previous sports. “ And will they tell me,”

said she to Ranieri, (commenting on this circumstance,) “will they tell *me*, that these beings are not like us, capable of instruction and improvement? And are their feelings to be for ever trampled upon; their natures debased by slavery, their virtues slighted, their vices alone condemned, while the higher classes are allowed to riot in luxury, and live in sensuality with impunity? Can you believe this, Ranieri?”

“Believe it! no, lady; but what can be done? Where is the arm that could for ever strike off their fetters? Where is the heart to conceive a plan for such an arm to execute?”

“It is a question,” answered Ildegarda, “which must not be lightly answered: our acquaintance,” she added, with a slight tremor, “is but short—may it not end here! and at some more convenient time we may discuss this subject—but now to the amusements of the hour.” Ranieri bowed, and was silent.

The *trouveurs* of Provence were the first who displayed their skill; they had many quaint devices in their lays; all were amorous, some were pretty, but their general character was not forcible; it was the language of gallantry, but not of true passion. They expressed a disdain of the Muses, who were now, they said, antiquated ladies, and they sought for inspiration from the eyes of living dames alone. A marble Muse was a cold mistress, but a laughter-loving eye, and tender smile, kindled a flame in all who approached to behold its power, and if permitted only one favouring glance, one sweet approving pressure of the hand, the poet's fame was secured for ever. He was lifted up far above this earth, and claimed kindred with ideal beings of perfection.

These lays were followed by many conceits of love and gallantry; among others, a vase, made in form of a heart, which was fixed on an altar, suddenly opened, and forth issued a flock of

turtle-doves, who had a parchment scroll attached to their wings, and the *trouveurs* besought the ladies to catch these, their messengers, and to accept the messages which they were to convey. The ladies were rewarded for their pains, by finding in every little parcel some madrigal or stanza in praise of their charms: many of these were written with much ingenuity and pains, in the shape of birds, dogs, cats, or whatever other animal might be the favourite of the lady for whom they were intended; and by a little contrivance, each of the doves carried his packet to the person for whom it was destined.

After the *trouveurs* had ended all their recitations, and that these and other similar conceits were played off, a masque composed of hired performers, enacted one of the mysteries then in fashion, which was founded on the legend of a favourite saint. This representation had not proceeded long, when Nino Pucci, fol-

lowed by a train of ecclesiastics, entered the theatre ; and scattering ashes on their heads while they smote their breasts, cried out, “ We denounce the curses of the Church on all such heretical entertainments ; and if they are prosecuted further, let those who command in this domain look to themselves, and those who obey such commands, or give a tacit approval by sanctioning them with their presence, expect the body’s sufferance here, and the soul’s hereafter.” He then proceeded to pronounce an anathema, which froze the very blood within the veins, in the event of non-obedience against all those who should so offend ; after which he prostrated himself, with all his brethren, to the earth, then shook the dust from his sandals, and to the sound of tolling bells from the neighbouring convent, marched away as he had entered, singing the curses he had said. So unexpected had been this event, that even Ildegarda was unprepared to make any reply, but when she

recovered from her first surprise, and while yet Nino Pucci and his brethren were within hearing, she arose from her place and spoke thus, “As it is my bounden duty to do, I reverence religion; I meant not to offend the opinions of any by these (as I thought) harmless amusements. The representation of these mysteries are sanctioned by the customs of the times; they have been honoured by the presence of churchmen; they are intended to impress with awe and devotional feeling the minds of the unlearned;—are they, then, only to be accounted heretical because they are performed in my presence? and within the precincts of my palace, am I thus to be made the victim of new opinions and doctrines, and my friends and acquaintance put far from me at the malicious suggestions of a disappointed jealous priest? I beseech you,” observing that a mute silence, accompanied by terrified looks, pervaded the assembly, “I beseech you, friends and coun-

trymen, deprive me not of the honour of your presence for such a cause as this. I will immediately countermand this part of the entertainment, which it appears gives so much offence, and has afforded my friends a handle to give me pain; but let not those desert me who ought now to show, by their countenance and support, that they are my friends."

This animated appeal, spoken with all the warm feeling of the moment, nevertheless failed to procure attention; seat after seat was deserted, and the gay crowd pressed together with symptoms of utter dismay. The *trouveurs* and performers snatched up the instruments of their arts, and disappeared, while, to add to the general consternation, a tempest arose that suddenly darkened the air with its terrific gloom, and then burst in magnificent fury, pouring down torrents of rain, and sending forth lightnings that ran along the earth in all directions. Ildegarda sought shelter in her palace, breathless,

astounded, alone; even there the walls only seemed to offer her protection, for, in an incredibly short space of time, every guest had fled far away, and not even one of her own domestics could she see, not even Rachaela.

For a few moments she stood in this solitude, hearing only the warring elements: she called her domestics, but no one replied; no human creature remained where late so many were assembled. She felt struck by some invisible power, and scarcely knew whether she was not indeed the child of guilt and the object of Heaven's wrath. At this instant the crash of falling thunder was succeeded by the destruction of that part of the edifice in which she stood; and recovering from the first shock which momentarily had deprived her of her senses, she thought the last hour of the world was come, and expected to be involved in the general destruction. There was an instant's awful pause, a sort of swinging motion succeeded, and

she beheld the walls of the apartment in which she stood precipitated to the earth, while she herself remained poised on the fragment of a beam of wood, which alone escaped the wreck, and on which she was miraculously preserved. Scarcely had she time to reflect upon the danger of her situation, when she heard voices of wail and lamentation, intermingled with her own name, and she beheld Bruno Grillo and Rachaela, who were making the air ring with accents of despair: a shout of delight burst from them when they first beheld Ildegarda still alive; but dismay quickly succeeded when they thought of the peril she was in, and the almost impossible chance of procuring her assistance from her terrible situation. Ranieri Lanfreducci joined the troop of tenants who now came forward to release their mistress, and with well-timed presence of mind, instead of adding by useless lamentations to the general sentiment of terror, he considered by what

means this might best be effected. “ I could,” said he, “ reach the rafter on which she stands, by means of those projecting stones, and having made fast some ropes, might form a temporary ladder, by which the Signora could descend ; but the still falling particles of plaster from beneath the very beam which supports her prove to me that my weight might be fatal to both, and I should probably, with my own destruction, hasten hers.”

“ Perhaps I might do this with safety,” cried Bruno Grillo ; “ oh ! let me attempt it ; I am very light—do you think I may ?”

“ There ’s my brave one !” answered Ranieri, looking at him with admiration. “ Yes, your weight is scarcely that of a feather ; but can you—will you venture ?—be it so. Look, boy, at that single brick, on which you must take your footing, with hardly any thing for your hands to grapple by, save yon splinter of wood ; do you think you can do this ?”

“ I know not, but I can but fail ; and of what use is my worthless life ?—only let me make the trial.”

Ranieri called to Ildegarda to beg she would not stir, seeing her make a slight movement ; and having procured an iron hook and ropes, he constructed, in a few minutes, a sort of ladder.—“ Now, Bruno, can you bear this weight, and yet climb yon fearful wall ?”

“ Yes ; place it on my back. Oh ! my hunch ! my hunch ! I shall love you evermore,” said the poor boy, “ if you serve me in this stead.”

During these active exertions for the relief of Ildegarda, Rachaela was prostrate in prayer, bathing the earth with her tears. Ildegarda, who had anxiously watched the preparations made to procure safety for her, now thought the means so uncertain, and attended with such danger to her poor faithful page, that she entreated them to pause, saying, “ I have thought of a way myself, by which I can descend, without much

risk : hear me, I entreat you, and suspend this useless contrivance.” Scarcely had she spoken, when Radegonda came hobbling forward in a state of distraction, followed by Benozzo and Cino in vain endeavouring to hold her back : her coif had fallen, her garments were torn, her white hair streaming, and her bony arms extended on high. “ My Bruno Grillo ! my beauteous boy !—and must I lose you too, and the other darling also ? Come down ! come down ! Bruno Grillo, if you would not see your mother die on the spot, and die by your means : oh ! send up Maestrillo ; go up all of you, but not my precious one ! ” and then looking again at her mistress ; “ oh ! my sweet Ildegarda, jump down, and I will catch you : have I not often tossed you on high, and caught you again safely in my arms, and you smiled and chuckled, and looked always sweetly on your old nurse. Come down, I say, dear lady ! gentle dove ! Do not let your poor

slave, do not let my Bruno kill his own fond mother !” and then she screamed fearfully.

“ Take her, take her away !” said Bruno Grillo. “ Dearest mother, there is no fear,” (pausing on the dreadful eminence to which he had already attained) but another scream from Radegonda, and—“ I drop my hold !”

“ Oh ! dear Bruno Grillo, return ! return !” reiterated Ildegarda, “ return, I beseech you ; and you, Maestrillo. Bring all the beds and cushions in the house, and place them beneath me. I command you to do this.” But ere this command could be obeyed, a gesture of wild despair, accompanied by another scream from the unfortunate Radegonda, determined Ildegarda to a hazardous resolve, and the next instant she cast herself from the fearful height on which she stood. A moment—a tremendous moment of silence followed ; the spectators held their breath : Bruno Grillo was forgotten ; all

ran to Ildegarda: she was taken up senseless, and some thought her dead; but owing to a quantity of sand which had been placed in the lower part of the palace, for the purpose of strewing the arena, where the games had been performed that morning, Ildegarda's life was saved. Bruno Grillo was at her side in a moment; and wild and childish expressions of transport, uttered by Radegonda, succeeded to those of despair. Ildegarda, only shook and stunned by the fall, gradually showed signs of returning life; but Ranieri, not waiting to know how far medical aid might be necessary, no sooner saw her once more alive, as it were, than he resigned her to the care of her female attendants, mounted the first horse he could find, and went off to Siena for his friend, the famed Doctor Cassini. In the interim remedies were not wanting; the senses of old Radegonda returned, and she used all her most delicate

arts to restore her second child, her mistress ! her dearest, next to Bruno Grillo, her dearest Ildegarda !

The next night, when Cassini arrived, he found Ildegarda going on well ; but the shock she had received left her weak and feverish. He thought it necessary, not only in compliance with Ranieri's entreaties, but for the sake of his patient, to remain some days watching her. When her convalescence rendered this attendance no longer requisite, her entreaties that he should stay on, and the delight of her society, which all felt and acknowledged, easily persuaded the amiable Cassini and his friend to prolong their sojourn.

When Ranieri showed Cassini the spot from whence Ildegarda had so rashly, but so generously endangered her life, to save that of Bruno Grillo, he held up his hands, and after some moments of mute astonishment, fervently eja-

culated, while the tears of admiration were in his eyes, "God bless her!"

"Had any body related this," rejoined Ranieri, "as having been your expression, when made acquainted with the story, without naming you, I should have felt sure that it was uttered by you."

Day after day glided imperceptibly by : Ildegarda was restored to perfect health, and able to enjoy the society of those who were now her only guests. They talked over the late tremendous storm, its suddenness, the unparalleled devastation it had caused ; and in walking about the adjoining territories, they beheld vestiges of its fury scattered around, which renewed a grateful sense of the providential escape of those who had been spared from the effects of its wrath. Fragments of rock, broken, and hurled to a vast distance from their original position ; prostrate trees, which had withstood the lapse

of centuries uninjured: streamlets swelled to torrents: all nature disorganized. Such were the mementoes which surrounded them in their rambles; and by none could they be more deeply, or poetically felt than by Ildegarda. To all who had suffered in their fortunes and their homes, she applied effectual relief; and to the beautiful objects which lay torn and mutilated in her path, she felt towards them as though they had been creatures endued with mortal life and sensation. "Nothing," she said, "in nature inspires me with a more mournful sensation, though it is one not unmixed with feelings of greatness, than a lordly tree, the monarch of the forest, upturned from its bed, and laying its beautiful foliage, faded and soiled, in the dust! Image of all that is fresh and flourishing, and secure, in one moment rooted out, laid low, and withered!" then changing her tone with a change of thought, "Do you know," she added, smiling, "to what this anger of the elements is as-

cribed? to no less an agent than myself!—Rachaella has told me all about it. Is it not so, Rachaella? am I not very like Jove's thunder? or it may be, a witch riding on and directing the storm."

Rachaella looked down, while a singular expression of pain displayed itself on her countenance, an expression which she struggled in vain to conceal.

"Come, my sweet Rachaella, relate your story: I insist upon your doing so."

Rachaelle unwillingly obeyed. "Oh, Illustrissima! I believe nought to your prejudice: I do believe you are the fairest and best of mortals: but there are evil spirits who may mislead even the best; and you should pray to the saints more fervently than you do, to keep them from you; and call in the aid of our holy monks also. Oh! pardon your Rachaella, if she offends you: but I have learnt deep secrets since you brought me here; and I do not speak

from my own impulse alone, but impelled by that power which commands me.”

Rachaella’s eyes were now lifted to Heaven, and assumed unwonted brilliancy and fire: as she stood clothed in her snowy raiment, with her upraised arm, she might have passed for an embodied spirit of inspiration.

“ On the day of your jubilee, lady, I would rather say of your misfortune, it is certain that the most extraordinary and fearful sights were seen; and that last band of *trouveurs*, who were enacting that most wicked mystery, were all observed to have cloven feet, which was not discerned, owing to the length of their garments, till after Padre Baldassare came, and exorcised them; and then when they were hurled away, as it were, all in a moment, they forgot their disguise, and appeared with the forms which really belonged to them. Then followed the appalling tempest! that tempest, lady, which to the last day of my life I shall never for-

get: and, oh! how nearly had the evil ones got possession of you. You know not, lady, but most true it is, that I have, through Providence, been the means of saving you." The auditors looked at each other in astonishment. "It is true, lady, indeed; for through the fury of the storm I flew to the chapel, and at the feet of our patron saint, besought his influence in your favour, when I was suddenly blessed with the thought of seeking the pious aid of Baldassare, who came bringing with him many of his brethren, carrying sainted relics; with these they marched round the ruins of the fallen tower, in which you were so fearfully placed, so wonderfully saved, while I remained praying for them and for you. The issue of the story is known to you all; and, oh! may you, my dear and honoured mistress, may you redeem your lost time; and may the veil which the wicked one places before your eyes fall off, or you will yet be hurled from that high and dangerous emi-

nence on which you are now placed, to rise no more."

The alteration which had taken place in the whole aspect of Rachaella, who suddenly, and as it were supernaturally, exchanged the timid appearance of a shrinking trembling girl, for the tone of decision, the voice of command, her emphatic gesture, her prophetic denouncement of evil, all so combined to astound her hearers, that for a time they gazed at her as if doubtful of their senses. Ildegarda first recovered her self-possession, and embracing her tenderly, she said, while she looked sorrowfully at her, "And are you, my poor pet dove, caught in the net of hypocrisy and artifice? Have the arts of the malicious succeeded, and art thou irrevocably snared in their toils? This is indeed no trifling matter." Having paused thoughtfully a moment, she continued, "Rachaella, I thank thee for thy care; I feel thy love, but above all, I feel my own misfortune. Retire at present, and

busy thyself as thou choöest : we will resume this subject at another time."

"Am I indeed without one friend?" said Ildegarda, when the last fold of Rachaela's garment passed out of sight,—“am I indeed placed within a circle of sorcery, from whence all good things are chased away? or am I destined to break the ignominious slavery under which the minds of my countrymen lie buried, and show them a light which may guide them to better things? Say you, that now hear me—Cassini—Ranieri—say what you think, and let me gather from the voice of experience the lessons of wisdom.” She went on rapidly to relate her education, her life, her opinions, her feelings.

“Wonderful creature!” cried Cassini rapturously; and then mournfully shaking his head: “You are indeed a star amid the darkness; but your own light betrays you, and says I shine above your sphere. This is most dangerous.

Hear the voice of age,—that voice which, like a stream that has coursed through many lands, gathers in its waters many substances; and happy is it when these disturb not the purity of its first source. In the honest pride of my heart I will say, because I feel it to be true, this is my case; and the worthless and polluting things that have been borne upon my stream of life have not mingled therein; but they have warned and given me prudence, by suggesting wariness and caution. Take, then, from me, lady, that lesson, which the less it meets your taste, you may be sure is the more necessary to your welfare. Your track of life lies, indeed, along lofty and perilous regions; take, then, the blinding fillet of presumptuous security from your eyes, so shall you walk unharmed. You may indeed, lady, accomplish noble things; but with all the power your ancestry and wealth confer upon you, you cannot effect them alone, or at once. My calling has led me to the chambers

of suffering mortality, and you may therefore conceive that I am not a competent judge of the very different situation in which you, Illustrissima, are placed. But the workings of human passions are the great mainspring of all human affairs; and he who studies these most deeply is best fitted to judge of every department of life:—from the humblest pallet to the silken couch, I have ever remarked that prejudices are the idols of poor human nature. Do not attempt to cast them down at once: it is for a higher authority than that which is delegated to man to take this course. Conceal your too open contempt of these, and by stooping under the wave of power, suffer it to pass over you harmlessly. If you resist its strength, it will dash you to pieces.”

“But how,” interrupted Ildegarda, somewhat hastily, “how am I to stoop? Can I be false, and profess the thing I do not feel. Is it my fault, if the instant I prefer one being to ano-

ther, or single them out to be my friends, that creature is dissevered from my society, and their very absence is made a cause of reproach to me. Yes, there is no person whom I have ever loved, but the withering secret machinations of the monks have banished them from my presence. Fredolfo, for instance, first hesitated, then lingered, and at last left me. Rachaela's heart is with me still; but I foresee she will shortly be weaned from me. Messer Cino and Benozzo, the creatures of my bounty, have declared to me, that, in consideration of their friends, and their families, and their fame, they must forsake my society ;—and what have I done? I have no vices to confess to the priests, but a soul that scorns to submit to their falsehoods, and which feels for the subjects and wrongs of my degraded country; I would gladly sacrifice my all of fortune and of life, to see it restored to liberty and glory.

This is my crime ; and am I for this to stoop to court the very creatures I despise ?”

Ranieri gazed at her in mingled astonishment and admiration. Cassini also, with an expression of admiration, but not of approval, testified how much he honoured her sentiments, though he condemned their public avowal.

Then, with that harmonizing power, which no one ever possessed in equal degree, and which was the result of conciliatory sweetness blending with fixed principle, he dexterously avoided all jarring and useless discussion ; and coming at once to his point, said, “ Cara Lei, the matter in question appears to me to be thus : not at present what state your country is in, or what you are in reality, but what immediate step you ought to take to silence evil reports, to ensure your own peace, and retain the services and affections of those who are deservedly dear to you, but who, without any pe-

culiar fault of their own, from a complication of adverse circumstances, are likely to become estranged from you. Now, if I may presume to give my opinion, this step is, that you forthwith remove to Pisa: live there quietly enjoying the company of those most dear and congenial to you; and whatever be the objects at which you aim, do not let your arrows fly till you can clearly discern what direction they will take. The re-erection of that wing of your palace which has suffered by the tempest, is a sufficient reason to account for your removal, which cannot, therefore, draw down upon you the imputation of weakness or timidity; and your placing yourself under the immediate eyes of the Anziani will be a guarantee for your actions that will defy the power of malice itself." If ever tongue was gifted with persuasion, it was Cassini's; and this wise counsel sunk deep into the mind of Ildegarda, producing the desired effect.

A few more days saw her established in her palace at Pisa; and a few more weeks found her in the daily habit of passing many hours within the long aisles of the Campo Santo, escorted by Ranieri, and feeding on all the poetry of the pencil produced by the magnificent conceptions delineated on its walls.

CHAPTER VI.

ILDEGARDA'S BOASTED LIBERTY IS GONE !

OH ! tis one scene of parting here ;
Love's watch-word is farewell !
And almost starts the following tear
Ere dried the last that fell.
'Tis but to feel that one most dear
Grows needful to the heart ;
And straight a voice is muttering near—
Imperious ! we must part.

Anonymous.

OF all the enchanting ways of being enchanted, (and how numerous they are !) is there any so inebriating as that of contemplating with one of congenial tastes, scenes of high interest, and objects of powerful conception ? These objects

and these scenes elicit all that is finest in our own natures, and they cast a reflected light of brightness more beautiful from that very reason, —that it is reflected. The reciprocation of these feelings sets the seal to this perfection of the enjoyment of our nature ; and the second self, with whom this enjoyment is tasted, becomes incorporated with all the affections of our being before we know they are so.

Such was the first origin of the loves of Ranieri and Ildegarda. It were a pity that any thing should disturb the course of so ennobling, so peaceful a passion. Peaceful?—Yes, virtuous love is peaceful, till the storms of life, its envy and its malice, blow over it, and mingle extraneous circumstances with its nature, poisoning and polluting its purity.

In the daily walks of these lovers to their favourite Campo Santo, they became, in a short time, more intimately acquainted with each other's minds and sentiments than they could

have been in years of ceremonious meetings in the cold assemblages of formal society. One morning they stopped opposite to that fine poetical embodying of morality, where death with his sweeping scythe passes by the wretches who are maimed, diseased, in poverty and misery, and takes aim amid a gay company of ladies and cavaliers sitting in a flowery bower, with lutes and harps, and hawks, and hounds, and all objects of pleasurable pastime scattered around them.

Ildegarda involuntarily shuddered. “What, if that were our fate!” she said, pointing to the tremendous messenger. “What, if that scythe of terror swept us away!—I should not like to *die now!*”

“Die!” re-echoed Ranieri; and his eyes met those of Ildegarda—his hands pressed hers; and they mutually knew all that they had not dreamt of previously, or rather all that they had only dreamt of: then came the swimming

circles that rise before the eyes, obscuring outward vision ; then came that sense of bliss, too intensely sweet till the soul sickens with its sweetness ; then came the body's chillness, and the heart's fire ; then bloomed and vanished in one transient moment the leaf and the flower of happy love.

A letter from the Signora Lanfreducci was brought to Ranieri ; it assigned no cause, but besought him, by his allegiance as a son, and his duty as a citizen, to attend her immediately. Ranieri, with an expression of dismay, instantly put the letter into Ildegarda's hands. She glanced her eye over it, and in that glance read her doom.

" You must go !" said Ildegarda, with assumed composure. There is a secret charm, even when mingled with pain, in knowing that we can command a beloved object ; which rendered her task more endurable. " You must go, and I must remain ! This is another proof, that

what I have so often averred is true. It is no fancy of an overheated imagination : no sooner does the glow of affection shed a charm on my existence, than it is chilled and extinguished by some unseen, but ever active power, that appears to follow my footsteps, and blast my most innocent hopes !” An expression of deep despair clouded the fine brow of Ildegarda as she uttered these words.

“Hear me,” said Lanfreducci, in his gentle quiet voice, not the less forceful because no burst of passion swelled its harmonious intonation to loud or sudden exclamation—“hear me, Ildegarda ; I swear by the holy earth on which we tread ; by the sanctity of honour and truth, never to be one of those who forsake you ! I have secretly dedicated to you my life, a poor and inadequate offering for the prize to which I aspire ; and when I have proved myself not unworthy of you, I will then—but enough at the present moment. I go to obey my mother,—to obey you.”

Ildegarda shook her head mournfully.

“And you will return—when?”

“Whenever you may appoint: name now the time.”

“This day month,” was the answer.

“Methinks, lady, you have fixed my exile to a distant period.”

“And purposely have I done so,” she replied: “we shall both have greater leisure to reflect on the late circumstances of our lives. Something of its actual aroma must evaporate, and all the redolence of this perfumed existence will have subsided into the common atmosphere of human life.”

“Can you wish it should?” questioned Ranieri eagerly;—“*do* you wish it?”

“Not if it could last for ever; but if it is to cease at all, it had better cease quickly.”

“All things depend on you,” rejoined her lover.

“Well then, Ranieri, this day month—this

day month return to me, and then——” but checking the flow of tenderness that languished in her eyes,—“till then, adieu !”

“They parted; Ranieri to prepare for his journey, Ildegarda to the silence of her chamber, and the garrulity of her heart. The love she had inspired, above all, the love she felt (for it is the generous nature of true love to revel more even in what it gives than in what it receives,) was the inexhaustible theme on which she dwelt, with ever renewing enchantment: and then to live, not in an inglorious indulgence of vulgar passion, which cloyes and surfeits by the sameness of its coarse sweets, but in the perpetual improvement of her faculties; stimulated to exertion by the intellectual superiority of him she loved, exalting her own nature by her admiration of his. Oh! what worlds of blissful projects passed in rapid succession before the high-minded, impassioned Ildegarda, till giddy with excitement she rested her head on her

hands, and no image remained painted distinctly on her fancy save that of Ranieri.

She was aroused from this state of dreaming delight by the announcement of the Conte di Montescudajo. It was a rude awakening. She blushed at his approach, and betrayed a confusion of manner, as though he could have read her inmost thoughts.

“I fear I intrude upon your privacy, Signora; but when the cause of my visit is made known, I trust you will pardon me.” Ildegarda placed a seat, and, in the confusion of the moment, welcomed him with an apparent eagerness she would not have done had her self-possession not deserted her. But he was not deceived by this flurried courtesy, although he affected so to be. “I am come,” he said, “actuated by a remembrance of the friendship which ever existed between our families: I speak not of that which I once flattered myself existed between ourselves, though something of it, perchance, still attaches

to me, in spite of scorn and absence ; and your late invitation to me encourages me to hope that still——”

“What ?” interrupted Ildegarda hastily, and in a terrified tone.

“Nay, lady, be not alarmed,” he rejoined in a calm manner, which made her shrink within herself, ashamed of the precipitancy of her ungrounded fears : “be not alarmed ;” I was only going to add, that such return of favour made me hope that you will listen to some information I have now to impart.”

Ildegarda bowed her head, and he proceeded. “You must be aware, that from my very near relationship to the Anziani, I am well acquainted with their opinions and intentions, as well as with the general affairs of their government. Now, Signora, I know that they unfortunately regard you (however unjustly) with an eye of suspicion : the tidings of the late events at your castle near Volterra, have

flown far and wide over the country; and the lower order of persons do not hesitate to give you the most opprobrious names, while the higher observe with an eye of jealousy your talents, your possessions, and your power. I come, therefore, to offer you the especial protection of those whose good opinion it is of most consequence to you to obtain; and they have delegated their authority to me to say, that if you will accept a guard of honour to wait upon you in consideration of your father's services in foreign lands, they will be happy to afford you such a mark of distinction,—a distinction which will at once be an honour conferred, and an implied assurance of their favour and protection.”

Ildegarda had gradually recovered her self-possession during this preamble, and she had fixed her eyes on the speaker with steady and searching scrutiny. When he came to a conclusion, she said, “I thank you, Signor, for the

kind interest you express in my welfare. I thank your noble relations for their intended honour; but I would rather be guarded by my own innocence, and the attachment of my own people, than have any legal spies to watch over my footsteps and repeat every trivial circumstance of my life as though I were a guilty criminal. The whole world are welcome to know my principles; they are those of my forefathers who fought for their country in its best days of pride and glory; and it is the joy of my heart, to feel that my attachment to these should be so generally believed, and so thoroughly understood. I pray you take this message back from me; and add to it that I am not desirous to brave the powers of my country or the persons of its magistrates; so far from it, that I left my residence at Volterra to place myself within the walls of Pisa, under the eyes of its rulers; and that I gladly claim their

countenance and protection, though I decline their guards."

"I am afraid, Signora, that your words and your feelings are somewhat at variance; to decline the honour offered as a proof of their countenance and protection itself, is, at least, subject to this interpretation."

Ildegarda, who never disguised her feelings, replied haughtily, "A favour ceases to be one when it is forced upon the receiver: an honour becomes a disgrace, when the mind of the honoured feels itself degraded by its acceptance: for the rest, accept my best thanks." So saying, she curtseyed and withdrew, leaving Pafetta to think over her refusal of his pretended services.

Scarcely had she passed into an adjoining apartment, when the trampling of horses drew Ildegarda to the window, and she beheld Ranieri slowly passing through the street on his way to Volterra. He was followed by a numerous

train of attendants, and accompanied by Messer Cino. She hastily threw open the casement, and as he passed her, he bowed respectfully, and checking his rein for a brief moment, said, "Alla Giornata;" and then passed on.

On the occurrence of any dreaded event to which we have wound up our courage, we seem at first endued with a kind of supernatural strength that deceives us with an exaggerated conception of our own powers of endurance. Too soon, alas! this strength gives way, and leaves the mind exhausted from unnatural and forced exertion.

"I have acted rightly," said Ildegarda: "I did not attempt to detain him from his duty and he *will* return to me, and we shall mutually be more satisfied with ourselves, and each other, than if I had used my influence to detain him, and had been successful."

This was true: but then came the dread of change,—the dread that his austere mother, that

mother who had sedulously avoided even her acquaintance, would demand of him to resign his love for her. "Will he not listen to her representations? and if he does not, ought I to accept the proffered hand that brings with it a parent's wrath?" She hesitated not in her reply to this self-examination. But did that answer bring peace with it? Oh, no! an overwhelming tide of feelings burst over her soul, which deprived her of the power of reflecting distinctly on her situation. How fortunate, how wisely ordered is it that such periods of existence are necessarily shortened by the intervention of common occurrences! Radegonda peeped in at the door curtain: "Alone, sweetheart—and weeping; ay, ay, I thought it would be thus. Why did you let him go, dear lady? Why the bread was on the rise, and the yeast worked rarely; why set it aside to cool? You know not how it may be when it comes near the fire again; the frosts may have har-

dened, the vermin nibbled it. Dear heart, dear heart, if you had consulted your old Radegonda, she would have told you another way to set to work."

"What mean you, good nurse? you speak in riddles."

"A riddle that you can read though, lady. I have not dandled you on my knees for naught. You know the meaning of Radegonda's words, as well as she knows the meaning of your eyes. Signora! Signora, when the bird is in the cage, and you like its song, you should not open the cage door."

"I would keep no bird against its will, good nurse; and no song would be sweet to my ears, sung from a prison's grate."

"Ah! sweet soul, I know another tale, though thou art encaged thyself; and it is better to sing a merry song together, than a cheerless one alone—the Signora Lanfreducci."

"What of her?"

“ She is a proud one, and is of the Bergolini faction ; she never will allow Ranieri to return here. Mark my words, lady, he will never return ; or if he does, his wings will be clipped. He will be no longer able to fly hither and thither, at thy will and bidding.”

“ The Signora Lanfreducci,” rejoined Ildergarda, thoughtfully, “ is a wise and virtuous person. She will not commit injustice : and although her views and mine are at variance, I feel certain that she will not voluntarily wrong me, nor any one else.”

“ I know what I know,” said Radegonda, with tenacious wilfulness ; “ there are many things, sweet heart, which you can boast of knowing, of which I am ignorant. But a nurse is a nurse, and cannot be cheated : she has not dandled the young suckling on her knees, without understanding something of the plant when it is full grown. But, dry up thine eyes, sweet ; old Radegonda would give two tears for every

one of thine: these thieves of beauty have no right to thy blooming cheeks; let them course on mine, where there are channels enough ready made for them to run in."

"Poor, gentle soul," said Ildegarda, forgetting for a moment her own cares; "ever since I have known thee thou hast fared delicately, and no one to vex thee. What caused thy former tears? Tell me of thy life: what befel thee before I knew thee?"

Radegonda shook her head. "No, no; when the heavy road is trod, why should we go back to it? there is a miry, thorny way, which every one must meet with—but return to it! oh! no. I will tell you a story though. Yet, stay!—no, not now,—not now. The thrush has hardly built its nest: its eggs are not laid yet. The anemony's blossom is not opened above the green spike of the corn: neither is the season come for my story. Good morrow: be of good heart, come what may. But St. Gregorio be

blessed ! there is Bruno Grillo and Maestrillo, waiting for their *frittture*, and here am I chattering, as if my tongue was not made for scolding instead of running on thus with thee."

Away hastened Radegonda, and with her the curiosity which she had for a moment excited : back flew the spring of thought in Ildegarda's mind to its primary position, and all matters irrelevant to that faded into forgetfulness. Again her privacy was broken in upon.

" Signora," said Rachaela, entering, " I come to crave a boon of thee. Give me my liberty for a few days : I wish to go to the Isola della Gorgona, there to remain for a time in solitary contemplation and devotion."

Ildegarda started from her reverie, and hastily exclaimed, " To the Isola della Gorgona ! Who has put that idea into your mind ? To whom are you going ? and who is to be the companion of your journey ?"

" No one will accompany me : I shall be un-

der the protection of San Gregorio ; and I shall reside in the convent belonging to the sisterhood of that order."

"Who has inspired you with this wish, Rachaela? But I need not ask, for in this I read the designing artifice of Nino Pucci: his reasons I cannot divine; but that they are mischievous, I feel assured. Be advised, my gentle Rachaela: go not into that dreary solitude, there is danger lurking about; I see there is."

"Illustrissima, I am the child of thy bounty, and dependant on thy will; but I am much more than that—I am bound to thee in heart and soul; I shall ever do what thou commandest:—yet hear me;" and she knelt as she spoke, while her whole soul pleaded in her eyes. "Hear me, Signora, I entreat you; as you value my everlasting welfare, do not, do not prevent my going to that holy asylum."

It was an awful expression which now broke with stormy radiance over the countenance of Il-

degarda. She started on her feet, and with outstretched arms she apostrophized Heaven, and demanded of what crime she had been guilty, to merit the disaffection of all who were dear to her. Then turning to Rachaela, "Go," she said, "and know that Ildegarda never did, and never can, wish for the sake of any selfish gratification which is to be obtained by the forced obedience of any of her servants: the heart's service is all I seek; when I lose that, then all is lost to me. But Rachaela, to go alone and unattended on such a pilgrimage, would be so unseemly for a girl of your age, that I must not sanction such a mode of proceeding; Radeconda shall accompany you, and any of my serving-men you may appoint. Thus much concede to my friendship, dear Rachaela, and to my superior knowledge of the world's dangers."

"Illustrissima, dearly loved mistress, you are all goodness, at least you are all goodness

to me : how shall I ever repay you ? I am content and grateful to be thus under the guidance of your fostering care."

" When would you go ?"

" To-morrow's dawn must not see me in Pisa."

" Be it so ; and may you find in your temporary seclusion that peace which your friend will not find here within the splendid walls of a palace."

" Woe is me ! my loved, my honoured lady, Rachaela will pray for you," said she, going very near her, and kissing her forehead,—“ Rachaela will pray for you.” She then rushed from her presence, and Ildegarda was again alone.

CHAPTER VII.

RANIERI'S RECEPTION BY THE LANFREDUCCI.

“Perhaps without that high state of nervous sensibility which borders on insanity there is no superior genius in the arts which require tenderness of feeling.”

Life of Mozart.

WHEN Ranieri left Pisa, he proceeded in the same road nearly by which he had accompanied Ildegarda. From her castle to that city every step of the way had been marked by some word of interest, or some glance of dearer interest still. He wondered that the various objects he surveyed should no longer present the same mien they wore when he had then beheld them. He vainly now sought inspiration from their

influence ; all those bright imaginations which they had at that time lighted up in his mind, had now vanished, and he moved mechanically on his way, till he was roused from this dreaming state of being by finding himself in his mother's palace. Ermenegilda was still magnificently beautiful, and her presence operated upon him almost as a magic spell, when she welcomed him with the touching affection of a heart entirely devoted to him. He forgot for a moment that any other tie than that which bound him to her, had twined itself round his heart. Ermenegilda's soft voice sank into the ears of all who heard it with irresistible power of fascination : what then was its influence on her son, in whom she had, from earliest infancy, fostered every noble sentiment, and who knew himself indebted to her for every excellence he possessed ? For a time they discoursed on matters comparatively indifferent to that which occupied mutually their thoughts, but which nei-

ther wished to be the first to open upon. Where this is the case, where there exists a great central point of interest which engrosses our minds, yet which we dread to discuss, the flow of conversation is impeded, and to discourse becomes insufferably painful. Raineri rose from his chair, sat down, and rose again; he walked to the casement, gazed on vacancy, and then returning to the portrait of one of his ancestors that hung on the wall opposite, he said—

“How finely painted it is; every time I behold it after an absence, it seems ready to start from the pannel into actual existence.”

“True, my son; but the strongest interest it excites in me is the remembrance of the acts of virtue and the deeds of glory which dignified the life and preserves the memory of that warrior.”

“Yes, dearest mother, I enter into your sentiments; but something of admiration too is due apart to the noble art itself, which gives us

such a lively representation of the person thus honoured as makes us feel to be still living in his presence ; and mentioning this reminds me that I forgot to tell you I brought Messer Cino with me. He will be anxious to pay his respects to you : may I introduce him ?”

What tumult does a name, which is in the most distant manner connected with that of the one beloved object, create in the senses. Ranieri touched a link of the chain, distant indeed from the object, yet, in naming the painter whom Ildegarda patronized, he had at once laid open his soul's secret.

Ermenegilda knew it all, and bitterly lamented the fact ; but she replied, with unruffled tone, “ I shall be glad to see Messer Cino in due time and place ; but you know, my son, I never approved of putting persons of this description out of their sphere : remove them from their bottegas, give them the familiar intercourse which is held with our equals, and we lose our

own dignity without imparting aught of it to them; besides, there is generally a laxity of moral virtue in these figuranti on the scene [of life, which renders them dangerous as well as debasing companions. I would remunerate their services highly, but ——”

“ Ah! dearest mother, the soul cannot be paid with gold; and without soul what is painting? what, poetry? what, music? Did you ever see one of the professors of these arts who could or would put forth their powers merely for gain? There is that in the arts themselves which forbids this; and is not this in itself a proof that their professions spring from noble sources?”

“ It may be, Ranieri, that if persons so gifted possessed the advantages of a strict and pious education, they might become worthy of being admitted into the intimacy of those of high rank; but in general it is far otherwise: so much time is necessarily employed

by artists to enable them to gain a livelihood, that they can have little left for better things. And after all the boasted pride of your geniuses, there is a polish in the manners of those of noble blood to which the former can never attain. But granting this to be a trivial advantage, which at least you will not deny to it, the gracelessness of the characters in general of such persons, renders them very unfit associates for those who aspire to purity of life :—no, there is nothing worthy the pursuit of one of exalted station, but glory in the field and superior sanctity in the church.”

“Pardon me if I entirely differ from you. These are not the only honourable careers worthy of an exalted mind. In the natural world what a distance separates the stupendous rock from the pebble that paves the rivulet, the cedar from the floweret ; yet they are all valuable in creation, and alike the work of a wise Creator. So in the moral world, there is infinite variety in character, in feeling, and consequently in the

modes of usefulness for which each person may be best adapted ; but this is not regulated by any conventional prejudices of any particular class of society ; but by the direction given to them from the unerring power who made them : yet each one, though unconsciously, may carry on, and doubtless does, the designs of the great first cause, though following the bent of their different inclinations, all alike honourable in his eyes, all tending to fulfil his behest. How frequently do irresistible circumstances determine the line of life we follow ! If I look back on my own career, how much events beyond my control have influenced my pursuits ! I wasted the precious hours of youth in speculations of glory, in visionary hopes of soaring above the sphere of every day existence. But soon I found that to struggle for military fame was to sacrifice every principle of justice. Disgusted with the tumults of war, I then sought distinction by the cultivation of the arts :—there we are still great—there the pure and indepen-

dent spirit may soar in ideal worlds of glory, that the vulgar and the base can never attain. And do you call the followers of the arts ignoble ? on the contrary, they can ennoble the meanest, and raise the lowest to a sphere that mere rank never can reach. If some individuals disgrace their professions, that is no stain on its general character. Those who follow this walk in life, cannot be low or vulgar in their minds ; nay, I will maintain, that however little they may have mingled with the customs and fashions of the day, their manners are never rendered ridiculous by contrasting them with all the gay and the practised in the school of fashion : there is a native untaught dignity arising from higher sources, that is always theirs."

Ranieri spoke with more assurance in his own powers of reasoning, than he had ever done in his mother's presence ; for the thought of Ildegarda, and her endeavours to rouse the fine but desponding qualities of his mind into action,

had worked with powerful effect. As the subject which he had treated, however secretly connected in his own breast with that first object of his interest, had apparently run wide of the mark to which he first dreaded it was approaching, he had entirely recovered his self-possession, and expressed himself with a fluency and force of which but a short time before he did not know himself to be master. He was the more astonished when Ermenegilda replied in the same gentle voice, and without any apparent anger,—“ It is then as I feared. In a few months my son has been taught to despise the principles in which he has been educated,—the lesson of years—to disregard all the advantages of his birth and situation, and to give into a speculative philosophy, - which is only the covering for infidelity and treason. Ranieri, Ildegarda is the serpent who has beguiled thee; but the tempter, I trust, has not wholly estranged my son from me; that danger-

ous woman has not sò far gained her point as to prevent my child obeying my summons : I thank thee, heavenly powers, at least for this," she added, kissing the crucifix that hung at her neck, while her faltering tones now betrayed her hitherto suppressed agitation.

Ranieri, too much hurt, too much astonished to reply, remained silent ; and recovering her composure, she continued : " Ranieri, I ask no questions : I desire not to know what has passed between you and the Gherardesca ; but this I tell you—choose between her and your mother, for from this moment you must either forsake the one or the other. That my son should further the plans of the evil one, that the ferment of misrule in church and state should possibly be aided by my offspring, is a calamity for which I was not prepared, but it is my humiliation. I have been too lofty in my hopes, too confident in my success ; but ere I writhe under the disgrace of seeing my Ranieri

do aught that is unworthy of the noble line of ancestry from whence he is sprung, this heart will cease to beat." Tears started from the eyes of Ermenegilda, and her unhappy son stood the mute image of despair. At length he broke silence—"Oh! mother, beloved mother! so much have I to say, that I know not how to choose my words, or where to commence; suffice it to declare, that from Ildegarda I have learnt nothing but what is good, nothing but what is pure. I love her, it is true; and if your prejudices stand between me and the happiness I aspire to, although I never will disobey my parent by making Ildegarda my wife, I will never marry another woman. This I swear by the cross you wear, and by the sword I never have dishonoured, at the end of one month I return to Ildegarda, I repeat to her your resolves and my own, I obey you in whatever else you may command; and you may lie down on your pillow with the consciousness that

if you persist in your resolve, you make your son wretched."

"My beloved child, my own excellent Ranieri, I honour your sincerity ; and I place such perfect confidence in your truth, that henceforth I will never again broach this subject to you more ; you know my unalterable resolve, let that suffice."

Here this unexpected and melancholy conference ended. During the time that Ranieri remained with his mother, true to her promise, she never adverted to the subject on which she had so decidedly pronounced her will. She relaxed much of her rigid hauteur in favour of her son's friend, Cino, whom she even admitted to the honours of her board ; and she left no means unemployed to ingratiate herself with Ranieri, whose interests, as far as one human being can judge for another, she had most deeply and sincerely at heart. She spoke much of Pafetta, and of the Raspanti faction ; she rejoiced, she

said, to see what strength that party acquired in Pisa ; and she besought him to seek and conciliate the good will of so powerful and excellent a man.

“ Powerful he is,” rejoined her son, “ but his excellence remains to be proved.” The supposed murder of Ildegarda’s brother was the circumstance that occurred to him at the moment, in contradiction to this commendation.

“ Scandal,” replied his mother, “ is ever busy, and the Bergolinis are not idle agents in spreading its poison : but look to the course of Pafetta’s life ; look to the convents he has endowed, the religious seminaries he has founded. I feel certain that he is under the peculiar care and blessing of Heaven ; and, depend upon it, all things will prosper with him. May the protection even of his very shadow fall upon you, dearest son ! and, next to that of Heaven, your mother can form no higher wish for your welfare.”

Ranieri stifled his indignation. Messer Cino,

who was present with them at their repast, forced the sallad he was eating more quickly into his mouth, and washed it down with a plentiful spoonful of oil. Ermenegilda changed the subject, and all things relapsed into their regular tenor.

While time passed thus at the Palazzo Lanfreducci, Rachaela was safely lodged in the female Benedictine Convent, in the Isola della Gorgona; and, under the director of Nino Pucci, was performing acts of penitence for imaginary sins which she had never committed, that were far beyond her physical strength to endure, and far beyond her comprehension, as well as that of any rational person, to understand the meaning of.

Who that ever had seen the delicate form of Rachaela, clad in the coarsest garment of horse-hair, a cord around her waist, with which she inflicted sharp strokes on her ivory limbs, that sometimes covered them with blood—who that had seen her in this state, could have recog-

nised the late cherished girl, whom her mistress delighted to decorate with costly ornaments, and whose beauty she fostered as carefully as if it had been her own !

As to the nurse Radegonda, she was very near dead, not with her own acts of penance, for she submitted to none, and had taken care to provide herself with sufficient comforts, but from the anguish of heart she endured at witnessing the sufferings of the innocent Rachaella ; and for every bead she told, there was a murmur and execration against the Abbess, that once or twice had nearly cost her dear. The only relaxation from these rigorous exercises which the young penitent allowed herself was a Sunday's walk, at the foot of the rock on which the convent was situated, and in contemplating the lovely beauty of the place, she indulged that romantic melancholy which had lately taken entire possession of her.

The whole island was not above five miles in circumference, and its being dropped a lonely

and miniature gem, as it were, in the ocean, added to the interest its beauty inspired. The greater part of it is covered, notwithstanding its exposed situation, with thick masses of wood. The maple and the beech tree flourished in the richest luxuriance. There were few inhabitants on the island, save fishermen and shepherds. In the highest pinnacle of its highest rock stood a fortress, which contained soldiers, who were posted there in order to give notice if any pirates or unknown vessels approached the coast; and others were stationed in similar buildings on a reef of rocks on the shore below, to guard the only pass by which the island could be entered, namely, a steep and rugged flight of steps cut in the sides of the rock. Such was the place to which Rachaela had voluntarily banished herself, but why or wherefore no one knew save herself.

Radegonda had speedily shown symptoms of disapprobation at sojourning in such a pene-

tentiary, and declared that if Rachaela persisted in remaining there, she would return to Pisa, and send her mistress to take her thence. To threats and entreaties Rachaela remained unmoved; she gently replied that she was serving Ildegarda by remaining where she was, and that till her work was finished, she would not return to Pisa. The only circumstance which occurred to vary her monotonous life and the painful round of her self-inflicted sufferings, was the following. In one of her rambles by the sea-shore, the farthest point from the convent, as she was admiring the effect of a small fishing-boat, that lay on its oars hard by, while it rose and fell upon the element, of which it seemed to be a living offspring, her attention was caught by the voices of some persons in it, who, in those melodious tones which may be said to be indigenous to the throats of the Italians, sung the following words.

THE FISHERMAN'S SONG.

The sun is sunk, the night is grey,
The ripple is on the tide,
Come, shoot your nets in the sheltering bay,
Where our barks may safely ride ;
And the measured stroke of the oars alone,
To the fisher's song makes pleasing moan.

We have no care beyond our nets,
No thought save wind and weather,
And while the courtier fumes and frets,
We laugh and sing together ;
For the measured stroke of our oars alone,
Gives us a joy they have never known.

“ I never heard fishermen sing so in my days,” said Radegonda.

“ Hush !” cried Rachaela, “ listen ; I have surely heard that clear high voice somewhere before ; but be silent, I pray you.”

We envy not the rich or great,
We have the wide sea's domain ;
And happier far is the fisher's fate,
Who can such vain gear disdain,
And in measured stroke of their oars alone
Enjoy a delight to those unknown.

'Tis better far these storms to know,
Than those of a troubled mind,
For the waves and winds may roll and blow,
But a harbour still we find ;
And by measured stroke of our oars alone,
Can ride on the billow's stormy throne.

But that which warreth loud within,
The strife of unquiet souls,
Is the tempest dire of care and sin,
And nought its wild strife controls ;
It is not a stroke of our oars alone
Can bear such barks to a haven known.

Come, listen to the fisher's song,
'Tis fraught with good-will and peace,
For as our light barks glide soft along,
Our hearts are all love and ease,
And the measured stroke of our oars the while
Makes melody that our cares beguile.

“ That is a voice familiar to my ear. I should like to persuade these men to come near, that I may question them.—Perhaps—it is possible !—Can it be my long lost brother ?” She was endeavouring to make a signal to the boat,

when the bell of the cloister rang for the four hours' prayers; and recollecting that she had far to go to the convent, she hurried away as fast as her now debilitated frame allowed her to move. The moment she arrived she proceeded to her cell, and with many reproaches imposed upon herself a double penance for her negligence, and spent the greater part of the night in a course of prayer and personal castigation, till exhausted nature kindly came to her relief, and closed her eyes in temporary forgetfulness.

The next day she was unable to leave the mat on which she had sunk down; and when Radegonda came to her, she found her, as she thought, in a dying state. The attentions of the latter, however, and the application of restoratives, soon produced a favourable change in the young and vigorous constitution of the penitent, who was quickly able to resume the course of life she had vowed for a time to pur-

sue. The only recreation she allowed herself at intervals was rambling about the shore. One day, however, after their usual walk, Radegonda, weary of the tedium of the existence they led, and really anxious for the safety of her young charge, began to show determined symptoms of putting an end to such idle nonsense, as she termed their present mode of life, and, in consequence, declared that come of it what might, she would return to Pisa.

“How do I know all the while we are praying and fasting, and whipping ourselves here, what may betide my own sweet nurseling there? and then my own flesh and blood, my beautiful brave Bruno Grillo! that vile knave Maestrillo may have half killed him for aught I know. In short, if you are not tired of whipcord and starvation, fair Rachaella, I am; and home I will go. So tell me what message I shall bear to the Signora Gherardesca, whom, in my opinion, thou art treating very ill. Has she not chosen thee to be

her solace and her playmate, and here thou art forsooth, doing nothing that can please any one except the apothecary, from whom you must buy plaister to heal your broken skin."

"Patience, good nurse, I beseech you! one week, only one week longer."

"Oh, the Fates!—who can have patience with such freaks as these? One would think thou wert bidding me have patience for some natural wish of a young heart, and that the youngling was petitioning for a look of her beloved, instead of pleading to remain enjoying a stony bed and starvation. Truly, I think the evil one has gotten possession of the poor child, to be thus bent on self-destruction; why, even now thou lookest half ready for the grave."

"Ah!" cried Rachaela, who had hitherto appeared unmoved, "Ah!" she ejaculated with a face of terror, and in a tone of voice hollow and sepulchral, "Is it really so? and is there nothing I can do to avert this terrible destiny?"

Must I indeed become the prey of the dark fiend?—and my poor mistress, my excellent, my kind, my noble Ildegarda, must she too be sacrificed? And is it indeed beyond the power of her devoted Rachaella to save her?” Then, as if lost in despair, she flew to a projecting point of rock, and, kneeling down, seemed only to bury herself in prayer, previous to leaping headlong into the sea; but fortunately Rade-gonda, clambering with hands and feet to the spot, arrived in time to seize the poor deluded Rachaella, and holding her fast exclaimed, “Now I have you, and it shall go hard with me but I will keep you.”

Breathless with fatigue and terror as Rade-gonda was, she could not exert much strength, had she met with any strenuous resistance; but fortunately for her, Rachaella was now completely overcome by the struggle of her own feelings, and she suffered Rade-gonda, after a few minutes of apparent insensibility, to lead her back to

the church of the convent. Here she fell into a sort of trance, from which she recovered so far at intervals as to say, with a wild incoherent tone and phraseology,—

“If, indeed, there are no hopes for me, let all Ildegarda’s sins be heaped tenfold on my devoted head; but spare, oh! spare that generous and most kind mistress!”

“They have turned her brain, poor child! Many a misfortune I have seen arise from pressing too much on the same subject. St. Gregorio knows that if I had been plagued longer with my poor dear husband, Santa Rosalia, shrive his sins! I should not have been here now: and then, indeed, what would have become of Bruno Grillo, the brave one? or the Signora, my mistress? or you yourself? No, no: when things come to a height, down they roll again; and either you or Nino Pucci must be cut off very shortly.”

“Oh! you pronounce my doom,” faintly ejaculated Rachacella, crossing herself; and then

she sank on the pavement of the chapel, to which they had returned.

This time, Radegonda did indeed believe that the unfortunate girl was gone for ever ! Loudly did she scream, and call on every name within the convent walls to come to her aid.

The first person who appeared was Nino Pucci himself, and in the unchecked ebullition of her wrath, Radegonda spared no severe truth in relating to him, how she believed it to be by his cruel art alone, that Rachaella had gradually been led on, to practise the austerities which had nearly deprived her of her reason and her life.

Nino Pucci seemed alarmed, for he replied not as he would otherwise have done to the invectives which were poured upon him by a person in such humble life as Radegonda. He soothed her to silence, however, and lent his assistance to convey Rachaella to the sisterhood of the convent, who collected around the in-

sensible girl; and testified their sorrow and alarm by giving her every succour in their power.

“It is useless (cried the incensed old nurse) to give her any relief, if you intend to persist in your late treatment of her; it is only bringing her to life to cast her back to death again! and I will myself go with a petition to the Anziani, to claim a just vengeance on your head, before you put the finishing stroke to your villainy!”

“Softly, good nurse; beware how you meddle with the affairs of the Church! You and your proud mistress will live perhaps to rue the day that you have set up your foolish wills in contradiction to powers you cannot conquer. If you do not fear the powers of darkness, fear those of a justly offended brotherhood!”

“Ah! you say right enough,” cried Rade-gonda, nothing daunted. “You are all of you much worse than the evil one; for I can pray to St. Ranieri or St. Gregorio against

him ; and my prayers will be heard : but it is in vain that I pray to you, hearts of stone that you are !”

During this abusive colloquy, Rachaela was gradually recovering from the fainting fit into which exhaustion of bodily strength and excitement of feelings had thrown her. Rade-gonda administered one of the comforting doses which she had kept carefully concealed in her own cell ; and having moreover brought from thence some good bedding, which she had obtained from some fishermen who procured it from Leghorn for her, Rachaela, the penitent, being placed thereon, instead of the mat on which she had hitherto lain, was gradually restored to life ; but her recovery to natural strength proved at this time so tedious and imperfect, that Nino Pucci himself advised her returning to Pisa ; for it by no means entered into his views that she should die—having sent a messenger to Ildegarda. A conveyance was quickly in readiness to bear Rachaela in safety to her home.

CHAPTER VIII.

RACHAELLA'S RETURN TO ILDEGARDA.—THE MEETING
OF THE LATTER WITH RANIERI.—RACHAELLA'S
NARRATIVE.

“ It is within the experience of many medical practitioners, that a patient, with strange and unusual symptoms of disease, has been more distressed in mind, more wretched, from the fact of being unintelligible to himself and others, than from the pain or danger of the disease.”

Coleridge's Biographiana.

AND if this be indeed the case in a physical sense, how much more frequently is it so in the moral developement of minds and tempers ! how often are they rendered wretched from their incapacity to make others know what they feel !

Neither ought this wretchedness to be ascribed to caprice or waywardness: it is very frequently owing to the peculiar and complicated texture of that inexplicable mixture of mind and matter, which is in itself an inexhaustible source of wonder and entertainment to the speculative and sane observer.

When Ildegarda pressed her young friend once more in her arms, she started involuntarily at the touch of her almost fleshless frame. Nothing remained unchanged of the late blooming Rachaela, save her large blue eyes, and long fair hair.

“Who has done this?” cried her mistress, “what canker-worm has fostered upon my flower? And thou, Radegonda, what hast thou not to answer for? why didst thou not tell me of this havoc? why didst thou not send for me? how dost thou dare to present my adopted sister thus disfigured to me?”

“Peace, gentle Ildegarda ! peace, Illustrissima,” softly answered Rachaella ; and Rade-gonda being at the moment busily employed with smothering Bruno Grillo in her embraces, the altered damsel had leisure to make the answer herself.

“Blame no one, my beloved lady, if you see me colourless and emaciated. You know, I belong to one who is of no colour.” And a yet more ashy paleness covered her face, as she spoke. “Do you not remember Marinella ?” Ildegarda did remember Marinella, and involuntarily shuddered ; but recalling her judgment into action she could not believe that Rachaella was Marinella’s child ; still less that any evil and supernatural agency had taken effect upon the innocent girl ; and she only gazed at her with an intense and mournful interest, while Rachaella’s words impressed the sad belief, that her senses had, by some means or other, been alienated. The poor damsel

meanwhile went on to say, as audibly as the weak tone of her voice permitted her, "Promise me, lady, to blame no one. If you see me altered, it is a blessed alteration; I was but falsely painted, with hues that were not my own!"

"There, now," cried Maestrillo, interrupting her, as he was assisting her into her apartment, "There, now," winking, and looking portentously at Ildegarda, "did not I tell you so, Signora? did not I tell you so? nothing that was real, or as it should be, could come out of that sulphureous nest. It must be a comical bird, who would hatch her nestlings there, and her plumes would smell of the singeing, into whatever other climes she might fly. 'Twas a sad day when she roosted in our tower, that's for certain."

"Begone!" cried Ildegarda angrily, "or tune your note to less offensive music: you, at least, are a graceless menial, unworthy of my protection."

“ It is all right,” sweetly uttered Rachaella, pressing her long white fingers on the fool’s shoulders as she spoke, “ it is all right: rebuke him not. These are the tauntings which make the down of Rachaella’s pillow. Your honeyed words are the thorns in my path. Maestrillo is right. I find every one, except thyself, dearest mistress, reads my doom written on my features.”

It was now past all doubt, in Ildegarda’s melancholy conviction, that owing to some unknown cause, her young and innocent friend’s reason had been warped, till it no longer could resist the pressure, and had burst the natural limits of its range, to wander amid shapeless forms of terror.

Ildegarda felt the blood’s cold revulsion at her heart, when this conviction impressed itself on her mind: but how this sudden calamity had come upon her, was another consideration. If by the trick of priestcraft it had

been effected, she determined most strenuously to use every means in her power, to hold forth the perpetrators of so foul a deed to public detestation.

Having seen Rachaella reinstated in her apartment, and safe under the care of her women, she summoned her old nurse to her presence.

“How is this?” imperiously demanded of her the agitated Ildegarda; “how is this, that my favourite damsel is restored to me in such a state?”

“Ay, how indeed, my own nursling: you may well ask the question. But never before, sweet heart, didst thou receive Radegonda with a gloomy brow. Has thy poor nurse given thee her earliest and latest fruits of kindness and of care, fed thee with her milk, sustained thy infancy with her arms, thy blooming womanhood with her services, to reap such a service as this in return? I would sooner give my mantle of

gold brocade, and my best tirings along with it, than meet with such another reception." And here a passion of tears quenched all harsher passion.

Ildegarda's anger was in a moment appeased. "Nay, now, my good nurse, my dear and honoured Radegonda, why dost thou grieve so? Good heart, I meant not to vex thee thus; but, in truth, my spirit grew indignant at sight of the poor child, so changed, so feeble, as I fear in such a dying condition. My suspicions of the perpetrators of this most cruel deed are vague and general; but you cannot marvel that I should be moved at the sight. Oh! who can have turned the wholesome flower of that young creature's blood in one little month's time, to the deadly chill of the poisoned current that now seems to run in her veins? Some fiendish soul has worked this withering change: and canst thou marvel I am wroth? Oh! not at thee, good dear Radegonda, not at thee: hush thy sobbings, for they be-

come infectious ; and if thou wouldst have answering tears to stay thine own, mine are not backward to flow. Forgive me, if I wounded thee ; but relate, I pray thee, what thou knowest concerning this sorcery."

"Ay, there now," still with broken sobbings spoke the tender nurse, "there, now I know my sweet nursling again. Marvel, ay, that thou mayest well do, and so do I, to see the altered creature that I have brought back, from that which I took out with me ; but, indeed, so far from chiding and frowning at thy old faithful Radegonda, thou mayest thank and bless her for having brought thee the poor child back alive." Here Radegonda recounted all that she had discovered, and all that she had not discovered of Rachaela's sufferings, and of the life she led at the convent ; and ended by declaring that she believed Nino Pucci to be a very wicked man ; and if she had not (to use her own words) set her back up against him, and claimed the young

chick out of his clutches by main force, there would have been a willow over her head, and a cross at her feet by this time; and that is all you would have seen of her.

“Thanks, my good friend,” rejoined Ildegarda. “Thou hast indeed merited far other reward at my hand, than those harsh words; but thou hast forgiven me,—say thou hast. And now it only remains for me to reflect on the best means to be pursued to save this ill-fated damsel, ere yet she is wholly lost.”

Ildegarda sought Rachaella; and having in vain attempted to elicit any rational account of her situation from her own lips, she forbore to tease her, and wisely left it to time and nature to restore her to her wonted placidity.

Having sent for her great friend, and most trusty counsellor, Cassini—he in whose breast, as in a secure place of refuge, did the old and the young of all parties, and of all humours, de-

posit their secrets—Ildegarda made known to him the state of her unhappy favourite ; and having heard her with that attentive ear, which suffered no subject presented to his consideration to be lightly entertained, he replied that, by what he could judge, the malady was in the mind ; and till entreaty, or gentle compulsion, could elicit the truth of the original cause from her, there was nothing to be done, save to prevent the approach of any one who was likely to excite her feelings or her imagination ; while every soothing care that could present pleasurable subjects to her, should assiduously be employed. “ And to whom,” he said, “ can I delegate this gentle commission ; who will execute it half as well as yourself ?”

“ To no one who will more eagerly attempt its fulfilment, I may, at least, assure you.” And although a deeper interest still throbbed in every pulse, Ildegarda, with unremitting

tenderness, watched over her favourite Ra-chaella.

The last day of the month was now arrived, which had been fixed upon by Ildegarda for Ranieri's return. The whole flow of her feelings, which had been temporarily directed from their channel by the unaccountable illness of her friend, now rushed back with redoubled impetuosity to their source of primary interest, and there was not a pulsation in her frame which did not beat with the agony of suspense. Ildegarda possessed the inspiration of unpremeditated verse; and she had recourse to this relief from the vehemence of her feelings, which to some not so gifted, and of less imaginative mould, must appear unnatural—but by others, differently organised, it is known to be perfectly compatible with the most impetuous and overwhelming sensations of which the human heart is capable.

As Ildegarda sat beneath her high Venetian

latticed windows, listening to every sound that passed beneath in the street, with that agony of tumultuous curiosity to know what caused it, which is intelligible only to those who like her have waited for the sound of footsteps which conveyed the life or death of happiness—as she sat thus, one hand supporting her beating temples, the other traced impetuously the following words, which best will show the anarchy that reigned within her breast, and the nature of that sentiment which made such havoc there.

What pain to catch each passing sound

Till hearing's sense grows dull,

To watch the minutes tardy round,

With beating pulses full:

Full of the tremor and the pain

Of dread uncertainty!

While hope and fear alternate reign,

And strive for mastery.

'Tis flash on flash a tempest dire

Of mental hurricane,

Lightning that sets the brain on fire,

While reason's on the wane.

How different is this mental storm
From nature's kindlier strife,
Salubrious airs, more pure, more warm,
To nature give new life.

When Heaven's wild lurid fires are past,
It smiles serenely bright ;
But once the mind is overcast,
What can restore its light ?

The mental storm, and strife may end,
But desolation's there,
And Death is then the only friend,
To cure that dark despair.

It was early days for Ildegarda to despair.
But who does not despair a hundred times,
that has ever loved ? and who that has lived,
through such moments will deny, that, even on
reflection, they yield not in agony to any other
grief with which humanity is doomed to be
afflicted. Poor Ildegarda ! in that one last day
of the appointed time which thou hadst named
for thy lover's absence, thou didst endure a
thousand years of common anguish ; for,

“ It is not the length of our life which can give
One idea of what it is really to live :
Ah ! no ; 'tis the heart that lives more in one minute,
Than an age of monotonous indifference has in it.”

“Hark !” cried Ildegarda ; and the trampling of horses sounded uncertainly in the distance. She arose, and placed her ear to the casement ; the sounds became more distinct—grew louder and more loud—quicker and more quick came the horses’ hoofs clattering on the pavement : they arrived at, and crossed the bridge : nearer still they came, and more impetuously, till they stopped at her Court door. Then passed over her, that closing of the hearing, that swimming of the sight, that pressure of the breath, which follows the intense feeling of suspense, resolved into a glad certitude. She moved not from the place where she was standing, but her eyes were fixed on the door ; its heavy curtain was hastily drawn aside, and Ranieri glided in with that quiet but rapid step, which told her all she wished to know.

“Alla Giornata !” he said, in a low breathless tone, pressing her hand to his lips.

“Blessed be it !” she answered convulsively.

“Blessed it shall be, then,” he replied, with more of rapture in the tone than he usually allowed himself.

Some moments of silence, delicious silence, restored these lovers to their self-possession. Again Ildegarda could hear and see; the mystery of her feelings had subsided to a consciousness of sweet and comparatively calm satisfaction: she could gaze with tranquil delight on the finely moulded features of Ranieri; she could listen to the music of his quiet voice, and reply to a thousand common place questions, which assumed a character of important interest, or of exceeding beauty, when proceeding from his lips:—but when this stage of enchantment in its turn gradually subsided, and that the inquiring heart sent out new questions connected with the futurity of its wishes—then sank the spirits, and the brow of Ildegarda owned a shade of anxiety even in her Ranieri’s presence. The great point, the nucleus on which

turned the happiness of her life, was suspended; for Ranieri had not yet spoken of his mother. A heavy weight was at his heart, and the first rapturous moments of reunion having passed away, his thoughts, like hers, in despite of present joy, reverted to that point, which involved not only the actual moment, but the future. They both sighed, and were silent.

But there is something in the human spirit which suffers us not to dwell on the actual moment. There is no *present* to us on earth—no isolated single instant of bliss, which we can unlink from the great chain of existence, and, completely blest, exclaim—“This at least is ours.” Such may not be—is not; but there may be illusory moments (and surely there have been in every one’s life, or dull has been that life,) which, hanging as it were between Heaven and earth, have owned the electric touch of each: the beam from above, or the vapour from beneath, have cast a splendour or a blight on

that suspended instant ; and Heaven or earth, or both, have claimed it for their own ;—and such, perhaps, was the mixed nature of this, to the saddened lovers.

Ranieri's thoughts were quickly reflected in his countenance : his brow resumed the seriousness with which it was habitually crowned. Ildegarda quickly caught the infection of that concern, and their protracted silence might have been chilling, were it not for that intuitive sense which exists between two united souls, and makes each one conscious that it is with the other their thoughts are busied, although not even a glance of explanation passes. At length Ranieri, in stifled accents, and with an unnatural haste, which betrayed the misery it was intended to conceal, related his unavailing attempt to persuade his mother to yield to his wishes ; and then he added, in a voice barely audible, “ I cannot disobey, and draw down a parent's curse upon us : neither will I obey.

She knows the strength of my attachment to you : she knows I aspire only to be worthy of your hand ; and if I do not obtain that lofty prize, death on a field of glory is all which is left for me."

The charm was broken ; Ildegarda's illusion vanished with these words ; and she foresaw, in long and drear array, the lonely journey of life that lay outstretched before her. Her apparent calmness, however, might have deceived a less interested observer than he who now beheld the dignified despair that overcast her features.

" I was in some degree prepared for this decision of the Lanfreducci's. How could I imagine, that one whose opinions, whose habits, whose object in life are so different from mine, could consent that her only child should be united to me ? was indeed wholly irrational : but who is not liable to their own heart's deceptions ? Thus, then, the circle of sorcery which appears to be drawn around me, expels another being, the last and

dearest, from my intercourse. Ah ! that circle will daily and hourly contract,—I feel it will,—till life itself must yield to the pressure: but, indeed, what matters it? if the life of life is taken away, how valueless is breath !”

“ I cannot endure to hear you speak thus, Ildegarda; say not so, I implore you ! You, who are surrounded by thousands, whom your bounty feeds, whom your goodness attaches, whom your beauty enchants.—No ! it is as it should be; your sun shines brightly in the horizon of life, some few clouds overshadow it, perchance: and it is a high distinction to have you own that the present circumstance may obscure, for a time, the brilliancy of your destiny; but these clouds will pass away, and it is I whose destiny is indeed blasted. I am a lonely man, unhonoured, useless; forget me, Ildegarda, forget me, or rather think of me only with compassion. I would not lose all at

once; I could not bear that and live: let your generous pity, your friendship soothe my sorrow. It was, perhaps, too much of happiness to think of calling you mine; but let me, at least, pass from such a pinnacle of felicity, to something less terrible than that total forgetfulness I but this moment pleaded for."

Thus, like one overwhelmed in the tempestuous waves, who catches at some frail substance for support, Ranieri continued to grasp at and press on the word friendship, till he believed he had substituted its actual measured feeling for that immeasurable one, which was not thus to be supplied. Yet so well, and with such artless art did he press his suit, that the lovers parted almost as well contented in the prospect of constantly meeting, which this new illusion held out to them, as in their late most passionate hope. It was all well, so long as they saw each other and talked together, but no sooner was

Ildegarda left alone to reflection, than her mind acknowledged the deception which love had placed on love.

A visit from Cassini awoke her from the long stupor which had followed the tumult of emotion which raged in her breast, and she tendered her hand to her friend as though she were grasping a rock of support." Then, in a more hurried manner than was natural to her, she entered upon Rachaella's case, that she might draw off his attention from herself, but in vain. Cassini had studied the mental as well as the physical world. He saw, and guessed that matters were not right with herself; one glance of her now flushed cheek, her glittering eye, her brow of pain, told him all her story; and it only remained for him to know how far Rachaella's case was connected with Ildegarda's, in order to judge of both.

"Let us see the damsel," he answered in reply to Ildegarda's questions concerning the

cause and nature of her malady : “ we cannot, like the Persian doctors, give our opinion without seeing the patient.” Then turning to Radegonda, who had ushered him in—“ Good nurse, I prithee bring us your young charge : but do not alarm the timid girl ; tell her an old man wants to admire her beauty, and be ground young again in the sun of her eyes !”

“ Ay, ay ! let Radegonda alone for executing a commission well that requires management. Why to be sure we sugar the edge of the cup that contains nauseous medicine : not that I mean it is nauseous medicine to behold the wise doctor, the good friend of all, and more especially the guardian angel of the poor ; blessed be the skirt of his garment ! but I know that it is nauseous to youth to have their little secrets pryed into, and to be obliged to turn themselves inside out, as it were, before any one.”

“ She is a wise creature,” cried Cassini,

smiling: "I never knew a nurse in my life that was not; it is their business to observe: and all practical knowledge comes from observation; and the knowledge that is not practical, of what use is it? They may say what they like in derision of old women and nurses, but the world would fare very ill without them!" Then turning to Ildegarda, and taking her hand with parental affection, he added, "Young or old, what should we do without you? You turn all our heads at one age, and kindly soothe them when they are weighty with care and disease at another. Ay, ay! go along, good Radegonda; spread out your garment, well may it swell with honest pride!" as she bustled out of the room like a ship in full sail. "Bring Rachaela quickly. But, Signora," addressing Ildegarda, and with an expression of concern in his countenance, "allow me to say, in the meantime, you are not quite as you should be yourself."

“ Oh ! quite well,” replied Ildegarda, evading a direct answer, and colouring, “ quite well.” He shook his head. “ Or if I am not, medicine has no healing balm to cure my ills !”

“ But friendship may ! — There now, good soul,” seeing her look distressed ; “ not a word more ! I want no secrets : why I have such a budget of them already, as would fill the Baptistery were they all collected, in manuscript : fortunately I forget the old ones, as the new come forward, or I should never find room for them in my head. No,” he continued, in a different tone, “ I want no secrets ; but only recollect, you have in me a friend ; and for the sake of those of your family who were my earliest ones, there is nothing in my power to do that I would not do for you.”

Ildegarda felt that his words were indeed words of truth, and that she had one city of refuge to flee to, as long as Cassini was spared to her.

Rachaella joined them, but not as it was her wont to do, bounding in as if her light step disdained the earth. She was leaning on the arm of Radegonda, pale, emaciated, breathless. “Why, my dear young creature,” said the kind Cassini, hiding his real feelings in beholding her, “I fear they have been making thee do too hard a task at the Isola della Gorgona. I must tell my good friends there in the Benedictine Convent, that they shall have no more of my comforting prescriptions, unless they distinguish better in future between a young budding flower and an old dried stick. I am happy, indeed, that thou art returned to this excellent kind Signora : here you will find your lost roses again ; and I shall again lose my heart. But tell us, I pray, what befel you during your absence ; and let us know why you are thus changed ?

“I am not changed,” replied Rachaella, with a voice made firm by exertion, but which was evidently forced into steadiness ; “I

am not changed ; I am only returned to myself : I ought to be hideous, for I am a lost one." For an instant Cassini was grave ; but quickly recovering his own heavenly sunshine of countenance, he replied, taking her hand, " Come, come ; if this is so, let us know all concerning the wonderful fact ; surely your best friends should be made acquainted how this affair came about. Sit down and let us converse on the subject."

Rachaella obeyed, but only for a moment ; then rose up restlessly : " I cannot stay long in one place," she said ; " I have a deal of work to do, and I cannot make you understand what is my malady ; that is one of the things that torments me most. I have a pain here sometimes," she said, putting her hand to her head : " but that is not what troubles me ; I do not mind pain ; on the contrary, I never felt so much relieved, as when I used to castigate myself severely."

“Humph !” said Cassini, looking from under his projecting brow with that keen clear blue eye, that, like a beam from Heaven, searched the very soul. “Now, tell me, fair Rachaella, would it not be most effectual to let one of the Signora’s servant-men, Maestrillo or Giuseppe, take a good long whip, and save you the trouble of going all the way to the Isola della Gorgona to do it yourself.”

There was something so comically serious in the question, that Rachaella looked astounded, but she neither laughed, nor made answer.

“Well, but my own damsel, answer me, if you will not answer our friend ; and tell me, are you not glad to return to me, your own sister, who loves to consider you as such, and who was so lonely in your absence.”

“Yes, yes, dearest Signora, I love, I must ever love you ; but I fear it is impossible to make either you or the Signor Dottore understand this matter ; it is too hard for you.”

To this assertion they made no reply, but looked at each other with significant and sorrowing glances. Cassini having felt her pulse, and made himself master, as much as possible, of the nature of this aberration of mind, dismissed her; and when she was gone, he said, in reply to Ildegarda's inquiring eyes, "I trust this malady is only temporary: the pulse is very much affected; there is considerable fever; and I have every reason to hope that some affection of the heart has occasioned this partial insanity, and that it has been increased by bodily suffering. We must amuse and divert her mind: that will be the chief remedy; while wholesome food and some slight medicine will co-operate to work the cure. I have sanguine trust that we shall restore this damsel to you."

"Ah!" rejoined Ildegarda, "I have sad doubts:—these priests are very demons, and they——."

"Hush! dear Signora," interrupting her; "the

walls have ears, especially where those gentry are concerned :—prudence, prudence.”

As he spoke the last word, Rachaela re-entered the apartment, bringing with her something which appeared of high value, in her estimation ; for it was rolled in many pieces of costly silk, and fastened round with a chain of gold,—the first present that Ildegarda had ever made her.

“ If any thing can explain to you,” she said, “ the nature of my disease, it is this history—my travels.”

Cassini and Ildegarda looked at each other significantly. “ Your travels ! Rachaela,” repeated the latter, in rather an ironical tone.

“ Nay,” whispered Cassini, “ do not check her too abruptly ; this is not the moment to reason with her. Let us elicit from her all that we can : the more we see into her imagination, the better can we judge in what the disease consists.”

“ Behold the history of my travels !” cried

Rachaella, presenting her manuscript with an expression of delight, while a faint roseate hue reanimated her pallid cheek. “Behold how beauteous it is!” and she displayed a long roll of paper, on which were painted many quaint devices, many figures of birds and beasts, and creeping things, and men and women curiously arrayed; besides these, were maps and views of places, inlaid with gold, and beautiful in their imaginative aspects.

“Ah! ah!” said Cassini, “you intend this doubtless as an heir loom to be laid up in the precious collection of manuscripts belonging to your mistress, to illustrate the history of the present times.”

“What I wish,” rejoined Rachaella, apparently pleased that he entered into this object of her interest with attention, “is to make you both understand what is the matter with me, and then perhaps, you will be able to know what is the matter with yourselves.”

“Very true,” gravely answered Cassini ; “and you will give us leave to read this curious transcript of your adventures, which will throw light upon the subject.”

“Doubtless,” she rejoined ; “I brought it for that purpose. I cannot stay to read it, but if there is any thing that requires explanation, make your notes, and refer to me afterwards ; when I will be happy to do my best in making the obscure intelligible.”

“Many thanks, dear one,” replied Ildegarda, taking her cue from Cassini ; “we will commence this interesting lecture immediately.”

Rachaella withdrew ; and Ildegarda turning to the Doctor, said, “But have you leisure now to examine this strange document with me?”

“Leisure ! certainly, it is my duty so to do : it is only the idle, dear Signora, who have no time for any thing.”

The manuscript was written in imitation of the long Chinese rolls. It was embellished with

much colour; saints and devils abounded, and creatures of every denomination. The text was written in a fair German character, such as Ildegarda herself had been taught, and had instructed her to write in. The Signor Dottore put on his most attentive face, settled his velvet cap on his head, drew his large cloak around him, and leaning over Ildegarda, listened with all the simple delight of the youngest mind to the following wild story.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HISTORY OF A LOST ONE.

“ L’homme ne sait à quel rang se mettre : il est visiblement égaré, et sent en lui des restes d’un état heureux dont il est déclin, et qu’il ne peut retrouver.” PASCAL.

“ WHAT I might have been before I was at Volterra, Heaven alone, or a worse place, can tell. I had a warning of my fate when I was once lost in the snow, but that did not make me what it ought to have made me : I was saved then, and forgot it. I looked fair when I saw my image reflected in the rivulet near the cave where we dwelt, but I was only a painted cheat. I had even then a restlessness about me, which made me unwilling ever to remain in one spot.

My happiest times were when I made acquaintance with the stars and clouds: the former used to throw long glittering lines in the rivulet at night, and I used to catch them, but there were often hooks at the ends that drew me painfully upward: and then, again, the clouds that I admired, would turn all black, and, pressing upon me, force me down once more upon the earth. Such was my strange existence, till Ildegarda came for me: she was sent by a higher power than she knew of, to take me to be her playmate; for I am destined to be of signal service to her. But, before I proceed in my relation, it is necessary to state, that two principles, the one of evil, and the other of good, hover perpetually over her; and she, unfortunately, is mostly governed by the bad one. This, I have learnt, is no uncommon case among the children of men.

“ I had not been long within the walls of her palace, before her good angel said to me, ‘ You are a lost one! There is only one way to re-

gain your station in the scale of earthly beings who have a chance of happiness, and that is, by saving other souls who are under the evil influence; and whom, by your sacrifices and sufferings, you may place under the benign influence of the good Spirit. Should you fail in this, nothing remains for you but to be whirled from one planet to another; from rocks to oceans, and from fires to snows, in one perpetual tempest of contrasted sufferings.

“ ‘But why am I a lost one?’ said I, appalled—‘What have I done that merits so terrible a doom?’

“ ‘You are the offspring,’ said my favouring Spirit, ‘of sacrilegious and heretical parents!’ Then, indeed, I heard the thunder roll, and saw the lightning flash,—but such a storm! Oh! I could never see such another, and live! ‘Cheer up,’ said the good angel; ‘cheer up, and set about your work. If in the space of time allotted to you for that purpose, you

can turn three souls to the right path, you will evade the terrible destiny that otherwise awaits you.'

"Well, these words sounded in my ears late and early : I did what I could. Ildegarda knows how regularly I attended at the neighbouring convent ; how earnestly I besought her to listen to the sage councils of Nino Pucci, as well as to Fredolfo ; how often I assured her it was all one, as long as they were priests, which of them attended her ; but woe is me, I saw with grief of heart, that even Maestrillo diverted her more than they, and that Bruno Grillo was much more beloved than any of them. By this I judged some evil was pending over her, which would soon end in her destruction. What am I to do? what can I do? I often exclaimed, in the dead of the night, as well as at morn and in the noon day. I cried to the winds—the clouds—the stars : they had spoken to me before, but they would not speak now.

Well, the evil one came indeed: down fell Ildegarda's castle; the gay throng fled from her, and she herself became a prey to wretchedness. Then Rachaela cast off her gay attire, and went about sorrowing—but, oh! to no purpose.

“ At last, one evening, as I sat on the topmost gallery of our beautiful leaning-tower, gazing around me, I heard a voice say, ‘ Rachaela, go to the Isola della Gorgona; lose not a moment; go there, and you have a chance of befriending Ildegarda.’ Although to the last Ildegarda's evil genius prevailed in some degree, and she did all in her power by her entreaties and her displeasure, to prevent my putting my intention into execution, I did go there, and from thence my travels began.

“ Radegonda was a great hindrance to my flights; for just as I began to soar, she said something every now and then, that drew me back to earth again. ‘ Never mind,’ whispered my genius, ‘ there are many such good people

in the world, but they only torment—they do not succeed. In fine, notwithstanding all these impediments, I made good my determination; and every night I set off on my travels—and saw such things! I cannot, may not, write of them all; but of those which I may, here is the detail.

“I was conveyed in a sort of transparent globe, of the most beautiful colours: this globe had two wings composed of a silvery substance: all the time that I moved rapidly in the air, I felt a delicious sensation; and when I wished to accelerate my speed, I found that by merely pressing my feet downwards, the wings flapped quicker, and away I swung with swifter motion hither and thither like a light cloud. ‘Where can I be going to,’ said I: ‘Never mind;’ answered the well-known voice at my ear. ‘Do not ask any questions yet: I am your friend, though you have never seen me; and I will

do all in my power to amuse and delight and serve you.'

"After some hours passed in this flying car, I found myself descending, and saw beneath me a magnificent tract of country, and one long line of light that edged a dark blue sea: at the same time I beheld a car, with a transcendently beautiful youth seated on it. I never saw mortal to compare with him save the Lanfreducci. He was guiding fiery coursers, and a number of fair maidens were dancing round them strewing flowers; at his back was an effulgent blaze of glory; and, as he passed onwards, all below appeared irradiated with light and beauty. The shadows retired before him; and exquisite was the fragrance which distilled from the scattered flowers of the damsels. I marvelled where this group were going, and from whence they had come; and, notwithstanding my friend's injunction I asked the question. 'Many a one, like you, has asked

and will ask it ; but had they eyes to view it as it is, a thing of spirit, they would know it is an emanation sprung from the brightest fancy, and will ever continue to astound and delight all who gaze upon it. Nay, even when it shall pass away, it will leave a track of light to say where its path has been !' I confess I was not much the wiser for this answer ; but, ashamed of my own dulness, I gazed in unsatisfied curiosity : and the pleasure the vision afforded me was not the less exquisite for being wholly unaccountable. What is there worth understanding, as it is called ? It is a sufficient pleasure to float about in a charming confusion, as I and my car did, without seeking any other certainty. Well, the whole land, now beneath me, lay in the broad blaze of day, and I found myself gently set down upon it. I picked up several of the flowers, which the dancing maidens had scattered ; and their fragrance was still very delicious, though not quite so much

so as before they had touched the earth. I was walking on a velvet sward of the gayest lightest green, save where the shade of some giant cypresses cast a dark stripe across its tender hue. The smell of the vine flowers, which hung pendant from tree to tree; the brilliant hues of the anemonies that clustered at my feet; and the sound of running waters, which brought a feeling of freshness to the spirit as well as to the senses—made me think myself in paradise, ‘yes,’ I said, ‘I am dead, and this is Elysium.’

“ ‘Not so,’ whispered my friend, ‘you are but a young traveller yet: you are now going over scenes that are to come, presently you shall go over scenes that are past, only do not forget them; whether they delight, or whether they weary you, take note of what you see. For it is a crime against spiritual intelligence to be allowed such sights, and to pass through such scenes, and not to treasure them up to the purification

and improvement of your being. Here are tablets ; write what you see.

“ So saying, he gave me this very roll of paper, only it was so small, and of so fine a texture, and so full of cells, something like a honeycomb, I could not have believed it would have contained half of what it has done ; in truth it seems elastic, and the more that is put in it, the more it seems to have room for.

“ ‘ Fear not,’ said my friendly genius ; who often answered my thoughts even when I did not utter them : ‘ whoever writes on these tablets, his lines are not effaced ; they are called the tablets of memory.’

“ I find his words, as all his words ever have been, were true. No one ever yet forgot what he really wished to remember. Well, I took the roll he offered me, and then I sauntered along an avenue that seemed to have no termination ; and yet its sameness did not weary me, so beautiful were the surrounding objects, so fresh and

green the turf beneath my feet. Suddenly, however, and when I least expected it, there was an end to its tranquil charm ; a change of scene took place. I found myself on a thymy sprinkled earth, I might say pavement, for the rocky ground on which I now trod, seemed bare of soil ; and it was marvellous how the lavender and dwarf shrubs 'broidered it with their odoriferous leaves ; as if nature would be ornamented even in her most rugged works. At a distance not very great lay a widely broken stream, that seemed often to have forsaken its regular course and chosen a new one, then capriciously to have returned to its original channel, leaving between high banks or far extended beds of gravel, on which the sunbeam or the cloud delighted to revel, and decorated also with a garb of beauty. Beyond this lay a zone of hills, circling the horizon, that might sometimes have been mistaken for clouds, had not, here and there, the projecting brow of some of them

received intenser colour, and given assurance of its reality. With this change of scene, my spirit also within me seemed to undergo a change, and I was less tranquil, but more interested in its hardier beauty. I moved towards the river, and choosing one of its many streams of water, followed it upwards, thinking to find its source. After passing several chasms, and much stony ground, I came to a narrow glen, the sides of which were high, and worked with thick and intertwining foliage; green smooth ledges of verdant beauty occasionally presented themselves; and the falling of unseen waters murmured lullingly. At every step I took, an indescribable sensation of tenderness stole over me, and my heart swelled with that feeling to such intense degree, that its nature was turned into pain. Languid and exhausted, I chose a spot where a thick cluster of laurels spread the densest shade around; and, yielding to the sudden sickness of my soul, I reposed

beneath their extended branches. Scarcely had I lain down, when a gentle sound of music stole upon my senses—it ceased; and voices, sweeter and softer even than the music, recited many touching ditties. Some of them passed away notwithstanding my tablets, on which I endeavoured to note them down; but one strain, far more endearing than all the rest, I was fortunate enough to retain; although, doubtless, very imperfectly, and with many inaccuracies.

Bless'd be the day, the month, the year,
The season, minute, time, and hour,
The beauteous country, place, and power,
Where I was bound by eyes so dear,—
Where I was joined first by love;
Bless'd the sweet anguish which I felt,
The bow, the arrows, whence were dealt
The wound which in my breast I prove;
And bless'd the sounds I've uttered,
Calling on my Madonna's name,
Tears, sighs, desires, I've numbered;
And bless'd the written leaves I've spread,
For her acquiring lasting fame,
While all my thoughts intent on one, allow none else
a claim.

“ Scarcely had the strain lapsed into silence, when another, as sweet but more sad, commenced :—

ZEFFRO TORNA, E’L BEL TEMPO RIMENA, &c.

Zephyr returns, brings back the beauteous time,
And flowers and herbage, his sweet family ;
And Philomel and Prognès’ twittering chime ;
And Spring, with every white and vermèl dye ;
Laughing the fields, serene again the sky.

Jove, to behold his daughter, doth rejoice ;
Air, earth, and ocean’s fill’d with Love’s fond cry,
And every creature joins the general voice !

But ah ! for me remains the heavy sigh,
That from the depth of my sad heart is drawn,
By her who holds the key and dwells on high :—

For singing birds, and flowery decked lawn,
And beauteous fair, with all their witchery,
Are but a wild, waste wilderness to me !

“ Then all was hushed again, till a rustling
of the laurels about me made me look round ,
and I saw, as through a veil of mist, a beautiful figure plucking a bough of the green fo-

liage, and then, ascending heaven-ward, it waved its hand to another figure who was standing at a distance, with uplifted hands and eyes, gazing after it. A lyre lay at his feet, and the laurel-bough was dropped by the departing spirit: he caught it eagerly, bound it round his brows, and disappeared from my sight. I was much interested in this transaction; and although melancholy possessed my soul, there was in it so much of attraction that I would not have exchanged it for joy. The shades of night now began to lengthen over the landscape; and a nightingale perched above me, singing at intervals, in melting, interrupted, and as it were doubtful notes; till bursting into a full and rapturous flood of harmony, it woke the echoes to reply; then again it dropped into broken trills again; and then took up a long cadence, on which the listening ear hung in breathless delight. The sweet sound grew fainter and fainter, till it died quite away: and now the

moon arose, and with her attendant stars gave light to a vast multitude of persons, who suddenly appeared upon the scene; they approached the spot where I had beheld the figures part, and where now a tomb arose. But, methought, this motley assembly was wholly unfitted to the time and the place; some came with mincing step, bearing what appeared to me to be wreaths of artificial flowers, which they hung round the tomb; while the studied attitudes they assumed, betrayed more thought of their own appearance, than of the spot they pretended to honour. Others again, with violent and frantic gestures, alike unsuited to the shrine, threatened to immolate themselves on the tomb; and these had at least the merit of momentary sincerity; but I observed that they had scarcely passed onwards, when the flames that had played about their heads, evaporated in smoke: some fell down and rolled about most ignobly, whilst others passed gaily on,

singing and dancing, and making gestures as they went, as though glad to have passed the spot.

“ There were others of this notable crowd who came along very measuredly, and with a sort of forced gravity, as if they were doing some necessary duty. These examined carefully every part of the tomb, and made long tiresome notes and far-fetched criticisms, on every feather and every straw which had accidentally fallen thereon ; and no one of them all seemed more contented with themselves: but I remarked that all those whom they compelled to listen to them, yawned frequently, and only watched a favourable moment to escape. One point the whole multitude seemed agreed about, and that was that each one should bear away some branch or leaf of a certain laurel, that overshadowed the tomb, and of which there would, most assuredly, not have been left one little stem, had their endeavours been successful ; but

of all those who grasped or tore at the tree, scarcely one person in reality succeeded in carrying away the least bit of its leafy honours. They imagined they did, though ; but I saw that, as they passed onwards, each one laughed at his neighbour's foolish presumption, and almost all went away without having in fact obtained the least particle of the tree. Apart from this crowd, and at long, lone intervals, there were a few isolated beings, who came forward to the tomb, apparently wrapped up in their own thoughts ; and when they reached it they stood by it in mute homage, or sat at its foot and read, with agitated voices, the lines engraved thereon. One of these, whose noble port and intellectual brow, could not be mistaken for any one save Ranieri's, brought with him a small volume, which, when unclasped, seemed to emit a gentle, purple light, and having perused it for some time, he placed it in his breast, and then, as if spontaneously, said—

'Tis precious!—and this kiss of mine
Is breath'd with reverent fear,
An offering at a well-known shrine—
For Love is worshipp'd here ;
And pilgrim hearts, who know to feel
The fond delirium well,
A dear, delicious balm will steal
Where Love hath set his seal :
His gentle accents ever sweet,
Though tuned to others' ear,
An echo in their souls will meet,
For love must Love revere.
Be bless'd, be virtuous, blazing soul,
In sweet, innocuous fires,
Roll on in flames, for ever roll,
Still fed with pure desires ;
'Till life with love, in gentle guise,
Shall blissful pass away :
And when in brighter worlds ye rise,
Wake to Love's endless day !"

“ When he had finished pronouncing these words, the laurel-tree shivered of its own accord ; and one leaf, self-loosened, fell on his breast. He pressed it fervently to his lips, and then looking furtively around, as if ashamed that any one should have seen the action, he passed into a lonely path, that no one else

seemed to have chosen, and was soon lost to my view. ‘ Ah !’ thought I, ‘ how much I should like to accompany you ;’ but I was not destined for that ; for, again overcome with all that I had seen, and the feelings such sights gave birth to, I fell into a gentle trance ; and when I awoke I was in my own cell, in the Isola della Gorgona, and the voice of an evil one, threatening me with destruction, alone sounded in my ear ; that voice which so perpetually assails me with indescribable horror.”

Here ended this curious MS. And when Ildegarda had reached its termination, she looked at Cassini inquiringly, to know his opinion. “ Truly, Rachaella is no common person.”

“ Why, my dearest Signora, here is sufficient imagination to turn twenty heads : but do you not see the drift of the whole ? do you not see the prominent feature of every part of this wild

story. Ranieri is first and last and entirely, the object of this poor girl's idolatry."

"How?" rejoined Ildegarda, colouring; though her heart had already answered the question.

"Why, truly the matter is plain; that dear girl has conceived a passion for him, which, aided by other circumstances, has for a time deprived her of her reason."

"What is there then to be done?" faintly articulated Ildegarda.

"One of two things, Illustrissima; marry her to Ranieri, or convince her that her love is hopeless."

An expression of agony convulsed Ildegarda's features. She paused, as if unwilling, or unable, to reply; but, too sincere to hesitate long, she conquered her feelings, and spoke quickly, like one who would get the better of a subject, that must be discussed, cost what it may. "With you, Cassini, I can have no concealment. Ranieri loves me; and I should have listened to

his suit ; averse as I am to resign my liberty—but why speak of this ?” continued she, her cheek flushing deeper red, and her voice becoming more inarticulate, “ the Lanfreducci hates me—and hates me with the hate of prejudice—a sentiment which you well know nothing conquers. There then lies the insurmountable bar to our union ; and why, knowing this to exist, should I selfishly say there is no hope for my Rachaela. Far from viewing the matter in this light, in Rachaela’s character I see the very traits that are most likely to ensure her the good will of the Contessa. Her birth, indeed, is at present unknown ; but who can say that it will always remain so. Her air, her whole deportment, give assurance that she comes of no ignoble stock. Should this turn out to be true, who then can affirm there is no hope for Rachaela ? and why should I mar her happiness, when, by so doing, I cannot add to mine own ? No, Cassini,” (seeing him about to interrupt her) “ hear me. Do not

imagine that I should conceive myself called upon to forego my own heart's wishes, could they be gratified ; but, convinced as I am that the Lanfreducci's prejudices are dearer to her than even Ranieri himself,—I know that for me no hope remains.”

“Generous, good soul,” cried Cassini, the tears starting to his eyes, while he vainly attempted to repress them,—“Upon my faith thou art a noble being ; yet hold, Signora, there is too much of haste in your decision on this subject. Pause and consider, ere you act upon this impulse. Ranieri has professed to love you ; and could he have been deserving of a moment's return,—nay, even of your good opinion,—could he so very soon make a transfer of his affections ; why, it pains me to exchange one of my old velvet caps for a new one, and is the heart a matter of no greater moment ? no, no, this cannot be. I do not think so ill of Messer Ranieri ; I do not think he deserves to be so judged by you ; and my advice is, that you inform Ra-

chaella of the truth, and root out at once her ill-fated attachment, by removing her from an intercourse with the person by whom, however innocently, it has been excited. The time of Carnival is not far distant ; procure for her all the gaiety which that season affords. Let her become acquainted with other cavaliers ; perchance her tender heart may be touched by some object who is more likely to return her affection."

"I am incredulous," answered Ildegarda ; "I fear the malady lies deeper than you think it does. It is her very youth, and the absence of all previous impressions, which make me believe that the one she has now unfortunately received, has a deeper stamp than you imagine. Moreover, I am very doubtful, how far, as a matter of conscience, I ought to act upon such a plan as that which you propose. One thing is most certain ; Ildegarda's happiness can never be founded on the misery of another ; and that other her own adopted sister."

"Doubtless it could not, nor would I have you

attempt to secure your own felicity at her expense. There is much to be done in this case, as in most others, by gentle means ; by not imagining that there is no intermediate stage between wretchedness and felicity ; or that the disappointment of a first attachment is necessarily to destroy the felicity of Rachaela for life. Dear, honoured Signora, have recourse to your own good sense. Time and absence will effect her cure. Think leisurely of the words of your old friend, and so farewell—and all good things attend you !”

CHAPTER X.

ILDEGARDA—JEALOUSY.

“It is impossible to attend to characters destitute of sense, and delightful to observe particular follies usurping the reason of those who, in all other respects, are wise. Fools who accidentally have sapience, are too despicable to be heeded ; but the wise man who is accidentally a fool, is an instructive picture of human nature, and worthy the most profound meditation.”

Mrs. Inchbald.

It is not the knowledge of faults and vices in others alone, which renders our advance in life dark and burthensome ; it is the knowledge which we acquire of ourselves, and of our own defects, which saddens and depresses us. Happy those who turn this knowledge to profit, and who seek a remedy in self-improvement !

Ildegarda sank into a species of supine indifference to every thing and to every person, and seemed little conscious of all that was passing around her; she frequently, however, caressed Rachaela, but these were the caresses which are bestowed on a child; and sometimes she would command her from her presence abruptly.

Meanwhile Rachaela's health, under the judicious treatment of Cassini, daily improved. Her mind in some degree recovered its sanity, yet still was she frequently assailed by wild incoherent fancies, the precise nature of which could not be ascertained; as it was judged prudent to abstain from all inquiries which might tend to irritate her.

During this time, though Ranieri sought the society of Ildegarda, he evidently imposed upon himself a restraint in the measured reserve of his words and manner, which rendered their communications very painful. She attributed

this behaviour to a far different cause from the real one. He appeared, she thought, too well satisfied with the line of conduct he had adopted; to be distantly and coldly attentive seemed too easy a task; and she felt inclined to quarrel with him for obeying her commands so literally.

Rachaella's amended health, her return to the enjoyments of life, certainly gave Ildegarda pleasure; but perhaps her innocent delight, the girlish joyousness of her manners, her unrepressed admiration of Ranieri, was not altogether so pleasing. Ildegarda would not allow the existence of this feeling, even to herself; but there was a restlessness in her mind, an almost peevish distaste for the world, very unlike her disposition in its natural state. One day in particular, while surrounded by her real friends and those who admired her most, she indulged in the expression of this humour, and distorted every subject to the crooked shapes with which her distempered feelings temporarily invested them.

“ I will tell you,” said Cassini, “ this world, Signora, which you rail at, and which people have agreed to call the world, but which means in fact only a very small part of mankind among which each individual figures ; this world then, as it is denominated, is a mighty pleasant good creature, believe me ; but to make use of a very homely phrase, ‘ you cannot have more of a cat than its skin,’ and the reason why people inveigh so bitterly against it, and are, as they imagine, so disgusted with it, is neither more nor less than because they expect from it what it never did, and never can, bestow. No, no ; we may all allow beautiful women occasionally to be captious, because all defects are pardonable in them—for a while ; but whenever I hear one of my own sex finding fault with the world, I always look at him with a suspicious eye, and think, friend, thou art either fool or knave, or it may be both. Believe me, the world is a mighty pleasant creature ; only do not, as I said before,

expect too much from it. In the hour of peace, of prosperity and relaxation, seek the world: in moderation, taste of it as you would of a strong cordial; but lose not the remembrance that it turns bitter on the lees: drink it not to excess, or it will lead to folly, ignominy, or death. Hope nothing from the world in the hour of sorrow. Hope little even from friends: try them not too much; it is painful to find them wanting. Trust only in that world which is *not now*, but which must come to all, whether they will or not. Look at the great word written over the portal of death—Eternity;—and seek your comfort there.”

Cassini had intended to probe Ildegarda's feelings, and awaken them, by a wholesome smarting, to a healthful and true tone. Nor were his intentions fruitless: when alone, she examined her own mind, and acknowledged the false medium through which she had regarded every thing; and she determined to eradicate

the evil that was discolouring her existence. Ildegarda's good resolutions were further confirmed by the unexpected arrival of Fredolfo. His mission had happily terminated; and his return diffused universal satisfaction over the whole household. His coming was welcomed by a general rush of all the servants, to meet him. They crowded around him, eager to kiss his hand, or even his garment; and his "caro, caro," bestowed on all sides, in a voice of benig- nity and protection, brought with it confidence and joy. Before she saw him, Ildegarda was inclined to assume a cold and distant manner to this respected ecclesiastic. But her better heart prevailed, and she said in a tremulous voice,

"You are returned, then. I never expected it."

"Signora, you wronged me; and, if from a sincere interest in your welfare I offended you, I fear I shall be likely again to incur your dis-

pleasure ; for there are some matters of which I shall think it my bounden duty to speak to you that will not, it may be, meet your taste or approbation. But ere you punish me with your anger, reflect, I pray you, on your declared sentiments respecting freedom of discussion ; and suffer me to declare my sentiments under the sanction of your own tenets. Allow me to remind you of my long and devoted attachment to all your house : and let me beseech you, not to cast off one, who, though of small estimation, and humble in his pretensions to power or interest, may yet, by his countenance and counsel, serve you in an hour of need.—*Illustrissima* ! speak, and let me know what I am to expect.”

“ Doubt not, good father,” she replied, “ that I am affectionately attached to you ; but if you are delegated by any body of priests, to attempt making me recant one of my principles, or stoop to their mummeries, I tell you frankly, you spend your breath in vain.”

“ Ma donna, listen, I beseech you. I would not attempt impossibilities ; but there is a prudence, which is not deceit ; and it is that which I would entreat you not to scorn. Be it known then to you, that your sentiments have been repeated in the very ears of the Pontiff, and the eyes of the whole Conclave are upon you. The late disasters which occurred at your castle at Volterra have been all related, and exaggerated ; and I should not wonder, if, as an enemy to the state, you were imprisoned for life : for, notwithstanding his Holiness’s liberal sentiments, and indulgent consideration for the weaker sex, there are not wanting severer members of the Church to impose, every now and then, some striking punishment, on a victim singled out for the purpose, in order to keep the public mind quiet.”

“ Infamous policy ! good father. I fear it not : that will never happen to injure me, so

long as one of the Bergolini faction remain alive to protect me."

"But why not avoid the evil altogether, rather than brave it. Hearken to me. Is it not true that Rachaela's mind underwent a very alarming change in my absence? Allow me to resume my care of her; and observe, if, in conjunction with the good doctor, I do not effect a complete cure. Should this most desirable end be brought to bear, let it plead with me, *ma donna*, in obtaining for me that confidence which you have so unjustly withdrawn."

Ildegarda was silent, but she listened attentively, and with a soothed expression of countenance, while he continued:

"Your having sought shelter in Pisa, under the eyes of the chief magistrates, has been a most favourable circumstance: whoever advised that resolve, advised you with the counsel of true friendship. If to back this happy event,

the Lanfreducci could be prevailed upon to come within your palace-gate, all malicious tongues would be put to silence."

"I would do much indeed," cried Ildegarda, breathlessly, "to obtain the friendship of the Lanfreducci, much even to see her,—but nothing that could make of Ildegarda another creature from what she really is, nothing that savoured of deceit or false humility."

"Leave that to me," cried Fredolfo; "for once trust to me: only this once be guided by me; and if I fail in serving you, in your own way, it is time enough then to refuse me."

Ildegarda yielded to his entreaties, and he resumed his station in her household.

Rachaella became daily more consistent and calm under his spiritual direction, and every thing around wore a smiling and peaceful aspect; but Ildegarda was far from sharing really in this peace. She appeared placid indeed to the eye of common observers; but to

those who knew and loved her well, a sickliness of soul seemed preying on her very life.

“Do, my dear nursling,—sweet, honoured lady,” cried the old Radegonda to her, one day, “do cheer up, and let not this moping mood get the mastery over thee. Ah! Radegonda does not say much, but she can see, and she can foresee more things that are, and that are to come, than many a one whose tongue wags quicker. Did I not tell thee that when Ranieri returned from the Lanfreducci, he would come back with his wings clipped?—and so he has: but there never yet was silken mantle so fine, that a finer might not be: and if I was such a Signora as you, Illustrissima, I would show them another kind of behaviour—*eh, come!*—not to dare to be in love with you, indeed! The flame that is to be put out so easily is not worth having raised; why, in my time, the more storm, the wilder and fiercer a fire of love would blaze; there was climbing up to windows, and tum-

bling down towers, ay, and breaking through convent walls too ; alas, the day ! but, poor souls ! they are dead and turned to dust ; woe is me when I think of that ! then all my blood curdles. But to come again to what I was first saying—could you not give me a little honey word, think you, sweetheart, to comfort that poor youth, who, I dare say, is pining and sighing his soul out ? To be sure it would be sad days for Rachaella, but there is other food for her : she is the young vine, and her green youth, like a tendril, will cling for support to any prop. Let me have the charge of her, and I promise you she will think no more of this freak, than if it had never happened. It is the worst thing in the world to immure young creatures in convents, and though it is our custom, I know it is a bad one. Why there you see our poor Rachaella was worked upon in such a manner by that wicked priest, that the poor innocent damsel thought herself as full of sin, Heaven bless her !

as Pranzetti is of Rosolia; and, after all, her fancies ended in love; ay, ay, that is the beginning, and middle, and end of all poor woman's wretchedness. I know a story—but mercy on me!—what noise is that?" and she hastened to the window, and pushed open the blinds: "some dreadful accident has happened: here is a lady has fallen down, and is apparently much hurt; and here is Cassini and Ranieri."

"Powers of might!" cried Ildegarda, looking out, "it is the Lanfreducci;" and flying past Radegonda, she was in the portico below stairs in a moment. The travelling litter of the Contessa was returning from the country, when the two horses both fell at the same instant; she was precipitated on the pavement, and taken up quite insensible. Her son, who had come to meet her, witnessed the accident, and as it chanced Fredolfo was at the same moment going out of Ildegarda's palace, and now sup-

ported by Cassini, gave orders for her to be conveyed immediately under its roof. Every thing was arranged quickly: the wound on the temple examined, the dislocation of the ankle attended to, her own suite summoned to wait upon her, and every precaution taken that the most delicate skill and attention could devise. The doctor, *par excellence*, sent off for the Contessa's favourite Esculapius; and having done what was immediately requisite, awaited the arrival of his brother professor before he would pronounce any judgment. They went through the secrets of their calling alone; and then both declared they were precisely of the same opinion, as they always do when they do not intend to quarrel with one another; which opinion was summed up in an order that the Lanfreducci should remain perfectly tranquil, and not think of being removed from her present abode.

What did not this event excite of interest in the breast of Ildegarda. Here, then, was Ranieri's

mother within her palace walls, dependent upon her for the rites of hospitality; and here too was Ranieri himself, almost an inmate, after having been absent for a length of time from her society. Ildegarda felt that there was no service she would not gladly have performed, that could have mitigated the sufferings, or soothed the confinement of Ermenegilda; and many hours did she watch behind her curtain door, unwilling to obtrude herself into her presence, yet breathless with anxiety to know how it fared with her. Once, and once only, did Ranieri discover her thus employed, and she hastened away with a feeling of mortified pride, that he should know the tenderness which made her thus servilely attend a being, who for her own sake alone, could not be dear to her.

As soon as Ranieri considered his mother to be out of danger, his heart vibrated with delight at the thought that the two persons he loved most were thus drawn, as it were by fate,

together. What hopes arose in Ranieri's breast ! It was impossible, he thought, that any one who had an opportunity of observing Ildegarda's character, could long retain any prejudice to her disadvantage ; nay more, that it was impossible to know and not to love her. It was thus he argued : but the heart undergoes strange changes in its journey through the world ; and those who have reached some distance on its road, have passed through too many thorny paths, not to walk warily, and to mistrust unknown ways, however beautiful and alluring their promise may be.

When the Lanfreducci first recovered sufficiently to know whose roof she was under, she turned immediately sick at heart ; and if she could have reproached her son for conveying her thither, she would have done so, but the presence of the two physicians, Fredolfo, and her attendants, put a check on this inclination ;

and she contented herself, with calmly observing, that she felt extreme regret in being the cause of so much trouble and inconvenience to any one, especially to a person to whom she was a stranger.

“ Ah !” said Cassini, “ misfortunes reduce all men to one level ; and as we are all alike subject to these, there is no saying to whom we may lie under obligations. The question has always appeared to me to be, how we could most thankfully acknowledge our obligations to our fellow-creatures when they are shown to us—not lament that we incurred them. I have gone through an ample space of existence, and I have always found the give and take of life as broad as it was long.”

This philosophy was not much to the taste of the patient, but she swallowed it with her other medicines.

Ranieri was indefatigable in his attentions on

his mother, and left her nothing to complain of. She had heard, besides, from others, as well as from himself, that he had given up all thoughts of any immediate union with Ildegarda; and that his behaviour had tallied with his professions. She thought it wisest, therefore, to temporise; and disguising her uneasiness and dislike at being compelled to reside under her roof, she mentioned the Gherardesca's name with a respectful sentiment of thanks for her courteous hospitality; and added, that as soon as she was able to walk, she would request an interview to make these acknowledgments in person.

Ranieri's eyes testified his delight, while he endeavoured to modify their expression by some common-place answer.

We often deceive ourselves, when we think that we deceive others, and this was the case at present. Ranieri's heart lay open to his mother,

and she foresaw, that whatever his conduct might have been, his passion for Ildegarda was in no degree abated.

Long before the Contessa Lanfreducci could leave her apartment, Rachaella had been sent to her by Ildegarda, with manuscripts, pictures, flowers, and delicacies of every kind, that could possibly deceive or lighten the tedious hours of convalescence.

The damsel's gentleness, her youth and apparent docility, won upon the unbending Ermenegilda; and when she further discovered that every saint in the calender received alternately the vows and adorations of this deceived girl, she became attached to her by all the prejudices, as well as by all the principles, of her nature.

At length, during the tedium of a recovery protracted far beyond the expectations of the medical attendants, Rachaella became

so necessary to the Lanfreducci, that the hours passed heavily without her.

Poor Ildegarda ! in thine own palace, and under thine own eye, the chosen sister of thy affections was weaned from thee ; thy lover was forcibly estranged ; thy friends, from policy, absented themselves, in order that they might administer to thine enemies' pleasures,—and still thou wert happy—happy, because it is the generous nature of woman to live always more for others than herself, and to find her highest gratification in self-devotion !

On the day appointed for the first meeting of Ermenegilda and Ildegarda, the latter summoned up all her fortitude, and though free from petty and ignoble pride, she yet felt her own worth, and her native dignity came to her support.

The speeches customary on similar occasions flowed with peculiar courtesy and interest from her tongue ; and there was a sincerity of kindness,

mingled with self-possession, that commanded both respect and love. The Lanfreducci was astonished ;—she had settled it in her own mind that every woman professing liberal sentiments, must needs have a forward, flippant carriage, a masculine appearance, and a loud dictatorial voice. In every one of these points she found herself wholly mistaken ; and, notwithstanding the haughty cold caution, with which she had determined to behave, she found herself, as it were, compelled by a superior power, to acknowledge her obligation for the kindness she had received, and to pay homage to the noble simplicity of Ildegarda's character and manners. She could not resist, however, in the course of conversation, touching upon certain topics which might induce the Gherardesca unguardedly to betray the evil spirit she had in vain looked for. But she was disappointed in this also ; for Ildegarda, without one grain of low cunning, was not devoid of that quickness of perception which

is the peculiar attribute of her sex; and she very dexterously evaded some points, and very rationally replied to others, in a dignified, composed manner, that wholly defeated every attempt the Lanfreducci made to expose or condemn her by her own words. Ermenegilda read the silent triumph that glistened in her son's eye during this interview; and although he appeared to be engaged in conversation with Rachaela, she well knew that not one word was lost upon him. When Ermenegilda arose to take leave, she could not avoid inviting Ildegarda to come and see her; but she did this measuredly, and there was a marked difference in the tone and expression which prayed that Rachaela might often be permitted to come and pass some time with her.

“There is a pious purity about that young creature,” she said, “which it is highly edifying to witness.”

‘I shall ever be happy,” replied Ildegarda,

“ to promote Rachaela’s welfare, and I feel sure that I cannot do so more effectually than by complying with your wishes to have her with you.”

Having paid the last courtesies of hospitality to the Lanfreducci, Ildegarda parted with her, in fact, as little acquainted with her as she had been before the meeting. But not so the Lanfreducci in regard to Ildegarda ; she had found a woman who was to her an anomaly in the human species ; yet, strange to say, although compelled to admire her, a latent suspicion, and even fear, lurked in her mind respecting her ; so distorting is the power of prejudice.

After this event, a few ceremonious meetings took place between the parties : at each one Ildegarda’s heart felt more chilled ; for her’s was not a heart to stand still at one point, and have its vibrations limited by prudential maxims. It was the daily advance in intercourse, in kindness, in affection, of what she liked, which con-

stituted her great delight: in *liking*, it was an interminable vista of an increase of these sentiments which she sought for in intercourse with those she loved. But, thus repelled, she fell back many degrees from that glow of open-heartedness, and involuntarily retreated within herself; till, at length, the intimacy passed into distant civility.

“You do not like my mother,” said Ranieri to her one day when they accidentally met in the Campo Santo; “you do not like *her*,” he said peevishly; “and yet you cannot conceive how much she was struck by you!”

There was something harsh in his manner of uttering these words; at least Ildegarda thought so, and she replied rather angrily, “Methinks, Messer Ranieri, it were better to judge by my actions in what measure of esteem I hold the Signora Lanfreduecci, without indiscreetly obliging me to answer categorically to a question

that you seem already to have decided upon in your own mind."

"Pardon me, Signora; I meant not to offend: but we do not understand each other now; we speak an unknown language, and we do so here in this spot, even here where once we understood each other ere our lips had pronounced our words."

He uttered this sentence so mournfully that the well-remembered tones which had been so long hushed, came over her afresh, like the trickling of living waters in a thirsty land. How greedily did her ears drink in the sounds! how rapturously did her heart swell as she caught them!

"Perhaps I was ruffled, Ranieri; perhaps I spoke unadvisedly: certainly I did so, if I gave you pain; it was not friendly to do so. Say that you are not hurt!"

An entreaty from one beloved, spoken in

a tender voice, who can withstand? Again the flood-gates of love were opened; the preceding coldness vanished like the snows before the spring. Oh! the blush of flowers and sunshine that seemed to succeed the late wintry state of their hearts.

The falling out of lovers is the renewal of love, says the old wise proverb; and, in this case, its veracity was not belied; the paction of friendship was wholly and for ever forgotten! Yet, though they tacitly knew it was so, they did not dare acknowledge the fact to each other; but yielding themselves up again to the delirium of hope, they sought no further to explore the book of destiny—the present open leaf was all they wished to read in. Oh! the danger of being again in that spot where the first influence of love stole over them!—even where the shadow of a beloved object has passed along, the very ground seems to retain the vision still.

The holy calm, the placid, and imposing aspect of the Campo Santo, replete with the highest conceptions of moral feeling, described in the most poetical imagery, was of all places the most likely to nourish and revive a deep-rooted attachment. Like all truly beautiful things, it delights the more the oftener it is resorted to, and the more intensely it is contemplated. The gay worldling might not seek its lone tranquillity. But let those who have ever acknowledged a master passion in their breast, resort to the Campo Santo, to its long cloister, its walls of wondrous decoration, and say, if that passion did not recur to them in all its freshness of feeling, and in all its glowing purity, while musing in its marble solitude. With Ildegarda this was more especially the case, and all things returned to her feelings, and to her mode of existence, in their former channel. Life was life again; and brighter than ever, from the late contrast of gloom. Rachaella was once more

the healthful, laughing girl. The usual tribes of artists and professors again sounded their sweetest strains, or exhibited the works of their art to the gifted eye of Ildegarda. Nay, even the common crowd of flatterers and idlers flocked around. But she beheld them under the beautifying influence of happiness; and there was an overflowing of kindness from her heart, which extended even to the meanest objects.

It is curious to observe the effect which prosperity produces in different dispositions and characters: on the really noble and kind, it unlocks a thousand sources of benevolence; but, when acting on the mean, and hard of soul, it indurates still more, still more inflates with foolish pride.

Ildegarda felt as though she would fain make the whole world as blessed as she was herself; and as she walked forth in brightness, and in beauty, her soul was all humility; all thankfulness and love. Every thing around her assumed

an air of joyousness and festivity. She redoubled all her charities: largesses were given to convents and hospitals; and one of the former, under the immediate protection of the Lanfreducci, was gifted with ornaments, and endowed with riches to great amount. Some said Ildegarda was making her peace with the offended church; some, that she was doing penance for her sins; others, that she indulged her love of ostentation and power; when, in fact, the whole truth might have been resolved into this one source—Ildegarda loved, and was happy; and would have gifted the whole world with love and happiness, could she so have done. But to all these surmises she remained indifferent.

If those who live upon busying themselves with the affairs of others, could but know with what sovereign contempt, or rather apathy, a being like her regards their observations, suspicions and evil forebodings, how surprised and mortified would they often be! Nothing disconcerts

intriguing spirits so much, as to have no intrigue: perfect openness of character is seldom believed in, because it is so very rare. And as it is a tacit reproach to the generality of mankind, they agree to undervalue it, or perhaps wholly to doubt its existence. In the present instance, they talked and surmised in vain: they threw no shadow on the happiness of her who soared far above them, in a bright sphere, to which they could never reach.

Ildegarda, who was of late indifferent to her personal charms and appearance, now took pleasure in her resplendent attire, and the consciousness of her beauty. She sat for her picture and her sculptured likeness to various artists, and during the execution of these works, Ranieri delightedly watched every stroke of the chisel, every touch of the pencil. His two predominant passions were indeed happily blended; and for a lover of the arts to be a lover also, and to watch the beloved image starting into

mimic life, is to enjoy all of pure felicity that can be known.

“I love an artist’s room,” said Ildegarda; “I would not forego the pleasure of being allowed to come to it, to obtain admission to all the regal chambers of the great, where silk and satin vie with gold and precious stones.” The room of Messer Cino, or, as he humbly called it, his “Bottega,” was a place of no common interest; for besides the absolute requisites of his art, each of which presented a thousand varied combinations to elicit imagination, he had accumulated many fanciful objects of beauty and of use, all of which he declared were necessary to aid his powers of composing. His window, constructed with no research of art, was only shaded at pleasure by a large purple curtain, through whose half-faded dye the light emitted finer demi-coloured tints, than if, in the fulness of its stream, it had sent forth an overpowering brilliancy. It was the practice of Cino

to paint under the natural light of day ; for he said that when the difficulty could be overcome, there was a truth and force in objects thus delineated which no contrived accident of light or shade could impart. In one corner of the room, lay piled up against the wall some rich cushions of eastern manufacture, the texture and beauty of which, affording a fine back-ground to many of his pictures, rendered them not merely the indulgence of luxury, but accessories to his art.

On tables of carved ebony were illuminated manuscripts ; on others, golden plate and vases of Venice workmanship ; whose beauty was enhanced by the fruit that lay on the one, and the flowers which dropped from the other. Near these sumptuous objects of taste were seen some of less costly materials, but not inferior in their beauty of form. These were the metal pitchers in common use even to this day, and the wooden dishes of the perfumed cypress wood, whose delicious odour reminds those who inhale it of all

the cities of Tuscany, where its fragrance may be enjoyed at every carpenter's shop. In other corners of this apartment were placed, on high-backed wooden chairs, peasants' garments; a veil, a silken scarf, and a lute; while on some of the falling folds of the drapery, a magnificent cat, of the wild breed of the Apennines, nestled in amicable, though unusual harmony, with a couple of the picturesque dogs of the Bolognese race. Add to the objects here detailed, the queen-like beauty of Ildegarda, the visionary form of the young Rachaela, Ranieri's matchless grace, the light of his commanding forehead and reflective brow; together with the attendant page, and his characteristic mother, the nurse Radegonda; and truly the Bottega of Messer Cino comprised a rare assemblage of all that could give inspiration to the pencil.

It was here that many delightful hours danced by unheeded. The poet Zanobi was always a welcome visitor, and it was to him no

barren ground. He gathered many a myrtle wreath, and many a laurel crown, in this fascinating scene; and while he received rich treasures for his own delight, he imparted pleasure to those around him.

The party thus engaged lived in a little world of their own creation; all those who were not admitted to it, and who would not have enjoyed it if they had been, were yet envious of the distinction, and sought by ill-natured innuendos to cast ridicule on this academia. This name was given to it more in derision than in any other spirit; and there were even some doggrel rhymes chanted about the streets, in which the individuals who constituted these meetings were satirized. No sooner did this scandal reach Casini's ears, than he came himself to join the party, and was received by all with that delight which he was sure to convey. Yet so charmed was he with the whole group, that having sat down to admire Ildegarda's portrait, he

could not bring himself to give her pain by relating this new persecution, and he literally ended by forgetting his errand, in the charm of their society. He was not suffered, however, long thus to lose himself in relaxation; for there came various messengers seeking him, from all the great and powerful of the land—some required his advice as a physician, others as a friend, and all wanted his presence.

“Cannot you make one holiday for yourself,” said Ildegarda, “when there are so many ‘*Giorni di feste*’ for idle saints, not to be compared with you in merit? Now let us institute one for a truly deserving man, and I will honour it most conscientiously:—yes, yes, bar his passage, let him not leave us,” cried Ildegarda to Rachaela, who was playfully extending her arms to detain him.

“Hush, Cara Lei,” said Cassini; “that tongue of yours, ungoverned as it is, will undo you: cannot you let these matters rest? they trouble

you not at present, but they may, and will, if thus you infringe on their prerogatives."

"Oh! if I must weigh out all my innocent thoughts, and put my words in chains, I shall become, like the rest of the world, unnatural."

"Well, well, Donna mia," said Cassini, lifting his hands above his head, "if you will not list to the voice of experience, you will one day rue your wilfulness."

"My dear revered friend," cried Ildegarda eagerly, for she could not bear to give him pain; "there is nothing I would not do for you,—nothing."—Cassini looked at her reproachfully. "Nothing except become that which I am not."

"May all good angels guard and guide you in your dangerous course!" replied this good and wise counsellor.

But she refused to hear the friendly voice; and he was no sooner gone, than the whole party forgot every thing but a scheme of pleasure in

which they were all engaged. This weighty matter was the preparation of a masque or pageant, which Ildegarda had first conceived, and which was to take place in the coming carnival. For this Messer Cino's skill was peculiarly put in requisition. Already had he made several designs for the procession, the beauty of which fired Ildegarda's fancy. She was to figure as Bellona, to have chained captives attached to her car, while her attendants were to personate other characters analogous to the story, and the *Giuoco del Ponte* was to be the scene in which this brilliant pageant was to figure with unprecedented splendour.

CHAPTER XI.

IL GIUOCO DEL PONTE.

Ah! contra i forti e i rei
Non val ragione in povertà di stato.

Passerini.

It was in March, on one of those evenings of Italian spring, when the glowing firmament sheds its early effulgence over that favoured land, that the pageant of the Giuoco del Ponte took place, in which Ildegarda and her train had proposed to figure with unwonted magnificence.

The celebration of the Giuoco del Ponte was commemorated in past times by a feat of arms, which began in sport of gallant hardihood, but

which too often terminated in real hostility. Its original and avowed purpose had been the maintenance of a warlike spirit and chivalrous courage in the Pisans, but it at last proved the cause of many secret feuds, and gave rise to many serious encounters. With the progressive refinements of society, it therefore gradually sunk into disuse, and in latter days has been abolished.

It was the custom to celebrate this festival every third year, during Carnival, when all the pomp of art, and pride of nature in her first garb of beauty, combined to give effect to the scene.

On this occasion the inhabitants of Pisa were divided into two parties, the Santa Maria and the Sant' Antonio. Six hundred men, the chosen of the land, were selected to fight for the honour of arms, and the love of their lady ; and the sentiment which glowed in their breasts invested every countenance with an expression of noble

emulation, and seemed to exalt them above their common bearing.

A more beauteous display could not be seen than that which Pisa exhibited, when Ildegarda set forth with her well-appointed attendants to witness the battle of the bridge.

The deep roseate hue of the setting sun illumined the Arno like a glowing gem, and turned the meanest things it touched to beauty; the very roofs of the houses and palaces seemed brodered velvet, and the innumerable colours which tinted the walls, resembled the precious inlaid work of a rich cabinet, rather than the stains and depredations of time and weather,—such a magician is the sun of southern climes. Yet this minute detail of objects did not lessen their general effect; over this glittering brilliancy a veil of middle tone was spread, shrouding its effulgence, and uniting it by a thousand delicate reflexes with the deeper shadows. The clearness of these very

shadows was a thing to wonder at apart, while the whole picture absorbed attention, as being entire and harmonious, although in its several markings distinct, detailed, and defined.

The ancient tower which flanked the Ponte Vecchio, rose darkly against the panoply of the golden sky; yet the small Moresque arches which so gracefully support its widening brow, together with every projecting moulding and prominence in the deep-toned mass, were traced in clear and sharp outline. Beyond the tower, the eye stretched to the distant reach of the river, studded with boats, which gave a heightened value to the landscape, opposing their dark brown and orange hues to the flood of light that beamed around them, while the parting orb of day again returning, streamed over the beautiful building of St. Paolo, situate on the southern bank, and which cast its softened image in the stream. Lower down rose the fairy Spina, a mixture of Saracenic and Moresque

taste, which, rich in foliage, figures and fretwork, delights the eye in despite of all the rules of architecture. Opposite to this, marble palaces shone in bright array, backed by the square towers, which reared their massive forms, the lofty and permanent monuments of family greatness. Such was the fashion of the times,—and every noble house boasted one or more of these fabrics as marks of proud distinction. Beyond them, the eye passed over the receding buildings of the town, till it reached the forked Apennines, which framed as it were this most beautiful picture.

Such was the season and the scene, when Pisa's warriors stood arrayed in martial order for the mimic combat; and her children of all ages, of all sexes, and all degrees, poured forth to witness the valour of their fellow citizens, to cheer and to encourage each his respective party, in the impending conflict. The windows of the Lung' Arno were crowded with

beauty, and no pains had been spared that woman's art could devise, to heighten and add lustre to the effect of their charms.

The jewels and gold which decorated the fair spectators on that day, were the means, in after-times, which aided the enemies of Pisa to found their rival opulence ; and by which Florence, in particular, was enabled to raise many a stupendous edifice, the memorial of her conquered sister !

But among all the beauteous women whose presence graced this pageant, Ildegarda Gherardesca was confessed to be supereminently fair. She had assumed the masked guise of Bellona triumphant ; and she figured in the scene with something more than mortal beauty ; for her fancy and her mind cast a radiance about her, which mere beauty of person never bestows. She was mounted on a car drawn by eight black steeds, housed in embroidered trappings, and led by Moors, whose half naked forms set off by

contrast the glittering badges of their servitude. But what attracted (next to Ildegarda's self) the most attention in this scintillating mass of gems and beauty, were four youths of noble birth, who condescended to play the parts of her captive slaves. They were chained to the car with golden chains, which Bellona was to unloose, when the signal of combat was given, bidding them fight for her honour, and for her favour,—that favour which all aspired to, and which none had as yet openly obtained.

Ildegarda rested on a spear ; her raven hair, parted on her Juno-like forehead, hung in rich masses beneath a plumed casque, and reached the bottom of her shining breastplate, which covered a form of faultless mould. Other nymphs, habited as Amazons, attended in her train ; and one of these was a blue-eyed girl, who seemed rather a favourite handmaid of Venus, than a warlike companion of her whom Ildegarda personated.

As the car passed along the gazing multitude, a whisper of admiration ran through the crowd: the higher class uttered that murmur of applause so electric to the being who excites it, while the noisy clamour of the lower orders (less coarse, however, in such public expression of their feeling than those of other climes) completed the triumph of the hour; and while *viva's* resounded from every tongue, and that endearing expression of tenderer rapture still, *Cara! cara!* burst from the enthusiastic throng, Ildegarda drank the inebriating cup of flattery, which was the more dangerous as she could not doubt its sincerity. Individual homage is dearer, how much dearer! but the voice of a multitude, the universal suffrage of public feeling, is the most fatal of all intoxications: it is difficult for one accustomed to its vivid excitement to lower the tone of self-love, or ever to feel gratified by less intoxicating praise. Ildegarda thought not of this; she dreamt not of

danger, but pursued her triumphant way : the present moment was eagerly enjoyed, and she continued her path amidst a moving mass of spectators, who seemed to have forgotten that they had assembled to look at aught else, save herself and her brilliant retinue.

Some few, indeed, among the throng, the parents or friends of the young nobles who played parts in this pageant, which their families considered to be degrading to them as men and citizens, viewed Ildegarda with different feelings, and failed not secretly in their hearts to curse her fatal beauty, and to promise vengeance on those personal attractions, which enabled her thus to mock at all rules of custom, to laugh at what was called decorum, (where virtue had no real share in the action) and sometimes, unconsciously sometimes—in the pride of power, to trample on long established prejudices with haughty disdain ;

a sin never forgiven by human nature, and least of all pardoned in woman.

Whatever licence exists tacitly in society, as to matters of real moment, prejudices in every country are gods of idolatry, which may not be thrown down with impunity; and, whatever be the degree of immorality sanctioned by custom, there is a veil of decorum thrown over manners in public, to which the women of Italy are tyrannically obliged to submit. The quiet Signora, escorted by Cicisbei and Pætitì, might then, as she may now, lead her dull round of insignificant monotonous vice, unproved, unregarded; but a young unmarried female to assume independence in her mode of life, to have avowed admirers, yet no professed protector, and to declare that she was mistress of herself, was a crime of too heinous a nature not to be taken notice of at that day, even by the highest of the state. The knowledge that this was the case,

gave additional zest to the ambition and vanity of Ildegarda : she aspired to be something superior to all those around her, whom she despised as the weak slaves of prejudice ; yet a woman's scorn, when its expression is indulged, is a weapon which always recoils upon herself :—but to the tale.

The warrior bands at the Bridge now drew up in array, and proceeded to the Duomo, to the sound of martial music. There the ceremony of blessing the banners took place, previous to the engagement ; and thither the motley crowd hastened, rolling and roaring along like an impeded torrent, that pours its waters through many channels to its destined course. It rushed down the byways and lanes to reach the spot before the combatants, and to obtain room in the cathedral to view the rite ; but still, in the midst of this confusion, all gave way to Ildegarda, and opened to her a passage through their ranks, as though she had been destined

by right to occupy the place of distinction. It so chanced, that Zerlina, the favourite of Pafetta, Conte di Montescudajo, had been in possession of a seat erected close to the font of Nicholo Pisano; but some one of the higher dignitaries of the state, regardless of this circumstance, turned the Signora Zerlina away, and with a degree of rudeness made her quit her post, to give place to Ildegarda. The latter did not, at first, perceive the measures taken to accommodate her; but the moment she was made aware that the Contessa Zerlina had been uncourteously dispossessed of her seat, on her own account, she hastily quitted the spot, and making her way through the crowd, apologized to the Contessa for a circumstance which she would on no account have permitted, had she been acquainted with it. At the same time leading her back to her place, Ildegarda withdrew, contenting herself by remaining in one where she could not view

the ceremony. This act of courtesy and atonement, instead of appeasing the person she had been so innocently the cause of offending, worked a different effect on Zerlina's mind—she vowed vengeance against Ildegarda; and this circumstance, instead of appeasing, excited her malice. Deep and bitter, we know, is the vengeance of a furious woman; and truly is it said to be no summer storm.

The Cardinal, who presided at the ceremony, having blessed the banners of each of the parties, and the children (whose office it was on that occasion) having covered them with flowers, clouds of incense rose from the chased censers of the priests, wafting their grateful odours through the lofty and lengthened aisles, while vocal music, of the most inspiring strains, combined to shed that illusive charm over the ceremony, which made the assembled multitude feel as if they were engaged in some glorious enter-

prise of patriotism, in which every noble faculty of the soul was called forth. Under the influence of these impressions, the accustomed rites closed; when the throng, rushing out of the Duomo in the same tumultuous manner in which they had reached it, once more lined the Lung' Arno, that was again covered with thousands of spectators. From every open window and balcony, gorgeous hangings, of varied hue and texture, were suspended; heads crowded over heads, and the jewels which adorned them sparkled in the last beams of the glorious sunset; cavalcades of horses, and rows of cars and litters, were drawn up along the river side; when gradually the loud clamour of voices, and the variety of eager gesticulations, sunk into quiescence. No sound now was heard; every one seemed to hold in their very breath; when the loud deep bell of the Duomo, accompanied by answering bells from every church and convent

in the city, sounded at the same instant, producing a most appalling signal for the commencement of the strife.

The combatants flew to the charge; and it was a fearful sight to see them rising like waves above the parapets of the bridge; now heaving, then sinking, and then swelling again, as if they must overflow, and be precipitated into the waters beneath, or be crushed under the feet of advancing multitudes.

This strife had lasted about half an hour, and the battle of the bridge had been lost and won several times by each party. Shouts of "Viva Sant' Antonio!" "Viva Santa Maria!" had alternately prevailed, when suddenly the knights were observed to suspend their efforts in order to give place to two combatants, Pafetta di Montescudajo, and Ranieri Lanfreducci, who had singled out each other from their respective ranks, and were engaged with more personal animosity than was allowed in this mimic com-

bat, for it must be remembered that the *Giuoco del Ponte* was intended only to give proof of porwess and dexterity in the aggregate, nor was it lawful for single combatants to engage apart from the rest: the rank, however, of these knights, and their noble bearing, obtained for them a license and respect, that appeared for the moment to hold the multitude in a spell of silent inaction; till the conflict at length assumed a character which created a general murmur of disapprobation among the spectators, and the magistracy were on the point of interfering, when suddenly a cry of “treachery!” was uttered by one of the combatants, and Messer Ranieri, dropping his talagone, (a triangular piece of wood, the only weapon permitted in these conflicts,) closed with his adversary breast to breast, by one desperate struggle raised him in the air, and by the next cast him headlong over the battlement into the stream beneath. Cries from all voices of “Traitor! Mon-

ster!" were poured forth against Ranieri. He was surrounded and seized; but it was soon discovered he was in no state to answer the questions that were mingled with the reproaches of the multitude; or to defend himself from their threatened vengeance. Faint from loss of blood, he sunk senseless into the arms of the persons nearest to him, and a poniard, found at his feet, seemed to imply the premeditated assassination. All was now confusion and tumult, in a scene which festive joy had so late pervaded: a thousand boats, that had been plying about in case of accidents, crowded to the relief of Pafetta, who was still struggling in the Arno; while the busy multitude above, hastened to bear away Ranieri, that assistance might be given him, if life was not already flown. The signal bell for assembling the company of the Misericordia tolled dolefully through Pisa; cars, litters, steeds, all crowded together, and neighing, jostling and entangled with each other, created a

general confusion, the women screaming, the men declaiming in all the violence of their passion, and gesticulating with that unutterable energy of action that invests rage with magnificence. The rumour of the event spread quickly into the adjacent villages, and a stream of peasantry soon joined the townsmen, so that the multitude increased every moment. The friends of both parties were loud in calling for justice, and maintained that they were each in the right. Thus in the midst of their clamours for mutual vengeance, one voice was asking questions while twenty drowned its vociferations by telling the tale each in his own way, and no two alike. Nevertheless, in whatever colours the partisans of Pafetta represented the affair, the moment it was ascertained how severely Ranieri Lanfreducci had been wounded, and that Pafetta had only received a few contusions, (though he narrowly escaped drowning,) than the general voice was in favour of the former. But Pafetta

stood in near relationship to the Anziani, or chief magistrate ; and where in this earth does not might frequently overcome right ?

Each of the offending parties were put under honourable custody in their own palaces, till the business could be investigated ; and in the mean time, the crowd were ordered to disperse. Slowly and sadly all now prepared to retire to their homes, talking, as they went, over this strange event. The serious viewed it with concern, from the consequences to which it was likely to give rise ; whilst the most thoughtless owned a shade of sorrow from a circumstance which, for a time, deprived them of their promised amusement. But upon no one did the catastrophe act with greater force, or make so deep an impression, as upon Ildegarda. What her feelings had been during the acting of that terrible scene, words can ill describe ! and when she returned to the quiet of her home, her mental sufferings were aggravated by the state of

agitation into which this event had plunged Rachaella. It is, however, always salutary to be obliged to act ; and this necessity now came to Ildegarda's assistance. Accounts were brought to her also, favourable to her wishes. Ranieri's wounds were not dangerous; he had fainted from loss of blood, but there was every reason to hope he would quickly be restored. Pafetta, it was said, had received a dangerous contusion, by coming in contact with one of the piers of the bridge. But, by all Ildegarda could learn, these accounts were much exaggerated, for reasons best known to the party. A few days of suspense passed by, and Rachaella, alternately reasoned or soothed into calmness, became restored to her wonted condition of mind. But still a doubt every now and then that the persons around her were deceiving her, and that Ranieri was dead, took possession of her fancy, and nothing but Ildegarda's conversation could then pacify her. She would listen delightedly to

the sound of her voice, even when her words were addressed to others ; and though often unable to enter into the full comprehension of her discourse, it never failed to work as a soothing spell upon her. But in the state of suspense in which Ildegarda remained, regarding the ultimate issue of the late mysterious and dreadful transaction, she could know no rest ; and a thousand contradictory wishes and wild schemes coursed each other through her fancy. Under these influences she frequently gave vent to the agitation of her mind in broken sentences, which were poured forth to an ear, capable indeed of all the sympathy she could desire, but unacquainted with, and unable to comprehend the vastness of that intellect which gave rise to them. Rachaela had poignantly felt the terrible event she had witnessed. But now when tidings were brought that both parties were in a fair way of recovery, all else seemed to her of no import ; and she marvelled that the Signora Gherardesca was not

more cheered than she appeared to be. Under this impression of wonder, fresh suspicions occasionally arose in her mind, that she was deceived ; and she would frequently gaze intently on Ildegarda ; but, checking the desire she had to question her, awaited in anxious silence the intelligence she did not dare to ask for.

“ Rachaela,” said Ildegarda, too much absorbed in her own reflections to attend to those of her friend, “ Rachaela, let me lean on thee, while I walk out to breathe the freshness of the hour.”

They continued for some time slowly to pace the open arcade, which commanded a view of the Luchese hills, seen as distinctly in the white moonlight as in the mid-day beam : then giving utterance to her thoughts, in broken phrase, she said :

“ No, it will never do : so many, many states, so fine, so great a people, thus parcelled out, become the alternate slaves of misrule or of ty-

ranny. Under one government they might again become the world's masters: but thus split and divided—never. Oh! might I become the means of binding their jarring and contending interests in one! A Queen!—why not? many a wise people have decreed that a Queen may reign: and such things have been from less beginnings.” Then turning to Rachaeella, as in derision of herself, she added: “Rachaeella! child, wouldest thou like to see me a Queen?”

“What! Illustrissima? I know not what you mean. All titles are at your command: are they not?” replied the simple Rachaeella. “Yet, nevertheless (she continued), were I as great a lady as you are, the title of wife to the noble Lanfreducci, would be my highest aim of glory and happiness.”

“Foolish child! thou knowest not what thou sayest. I could command an hundred, in comparison of whom Ranieri would be but as a weed among flowers.”

Ildegarda spoke to be contradicted ; or she would not have spoken thus.

“ Really,” rejoined Rachaela, incredulously ; “ why then the world is more replete with rare flowers than I had imagined, and methinks I should be content to live a thousand years to enjoy them. Still, still, he whom you name would be the fairest flower to me.”

“ Thou art a country damsel, and gapest at every thing for wonder. I would call thee fool, but that thou art a pretty fool ; and it pleases me to banter thee : I would give thee gold, and send thee back to thine own wild Volterra, for in good truth, thou art unfit for the bustling world. There in thy native caves, thou wouldst tend thy goats, free from the snares that surround thee here ; and thou mightest indulge thy wild phantasies without danger or reproof : but if thou goest on thus in all this freedom of thoughtless speech, there are many will hold thee to be a very light and worthless maiden.”

“ Illustrissima,” replied Rachaela, fearfully,

“ I will not offend again by my speech : but I thought, lady, you had chosen Rachaela to be your companion, to say all she felt : and, indeed, I knew not that it was wrong to speak as I did ; it is so natural to admire what is lovely. I talk of a flower, of the liveries of the heavens, of the hues of nature, of the moulding of a country, or the forms of yon mountains ; and what are all these to the lineaments of the human countenance. If the beams of light are reflected in a thousand different varieties of beauty in a landscape or a flower, how much more glorious are those which intellect diffuses on the human countenance. You have taught me to know and to feel all this : can it be wrong then to talk of it ? can it be wrong or dangerous thus to admire ; or to speak of what we admire ? ”

“ Wrong ? ” rejoined Ildegarda, mournfully. “ Woe is me ! you have asked me a question I cannot answer. All I know is, my innocent Rachaela, that it must not be. ”

“ Well, Signora, what you say I feel sure is

right, although neither of us understand why it is so : only, I beseech you, dear and honoured mistress, talk not of sending me away from you ; no gold which you could give me would make me happy, were I banished your presence. Once, indeed, I knew nothing beyond my caves, my goats, and my spindle ;—but you have taught me other things,—have awakened other feelings ; above all, I am called by a voice, you cannot hear, to a mighty work, and you would be—may I say it?—you would be unwise, you would be unjust, to turn me back to what I was. You cannot give me back myself, such as I was when you first found me. Of all the evils, that which I dread most is to leave you. Oh ! pain unutterable ! I feel it here,” she said, pressing her hand to her bosom, which throbbed with momentary apprehension ; “ I look to you, lady, as to a thing of light and wonder—a star that shines above me ; and having come within its beam, I think I should exist no more were that beam withdrawn.”

This was a language sweet to the ear of Ildegarda ; it was not to be purchased for rubies or precious gold. It was flattery, to be sure, if flattery be indeed a proper term for all the gentlenesses of life, yet it was the language of truth from Rachaella, and not the base adulation which flows from servile lips.

“ Rachaella, fear not,” said Ildegarda : “ I have adopted you as the sister of my affection ; it will be your own fault if you forfeit your claim to this title. I did but try you.”

Rachaella kissed the hand that was extended to her ; and Ildegarda sealed the promise with an answering kiss on her forehead :—seals of love and of affection, but sealed too often in vain, whether impressed by friendship or by passion.

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